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You need to upgrade your AVR! Pioneer and Sony pitch in p83

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2D-to-3D tech secrets revealed, p22

WELCOME



Anyone who thinks the 3DTV craze is 'soooo yesterday' is about to be disillusioned, because the fact is, **3D sets are just getting bigger and better**. Our world exclusive first review of Panasonic's 65-incher is a good case in point (p36). At the same time, 2D-to-3D conversion is progressing in leaps and bounds, and you can read about how it's done on page 22.

If you've already made your mind up about 3D, there's still the matter of upgrading your amp – and here we have a solution to suit every pocket, from Sony's £300 entry-level cutie (p70) to Pioneer's £2,000 ICEpower heavyweight (p44).

As for noise boxes, you should be enthralled by Monitor Audio's superb Platinum speakers, and Waterfall's quirky Serio/Elora 5.1 system, reviewed in depth this issue.

And don't forget, we have AV goodies to win from Alphason and Dolby. So get your entries in and get ready to have a good time...

Chris Jenkins
Editor

TEAM HCC



Steve May: *HCC*'s Editor-in-Chief has a stunning 20+ years as a CE journo on his clock



Anton van Beek: News Ed Anton began his pro-videophile career over 11 years ago



Mark Craven: *HCC*'s newly-appointed Deputy Editor cut his teeth on the Sub's bench



Chris Jenkins: Our ISF-calibrated Editor used to run Future's Tech Laboratories



John Rook: Art Editor John first worked on *HCC* back in 1999, when TVs were made of wood



Jill Lubetkin: *HCC*'s Prod Ed is new to the mag, but a stalwart figure of the AV department

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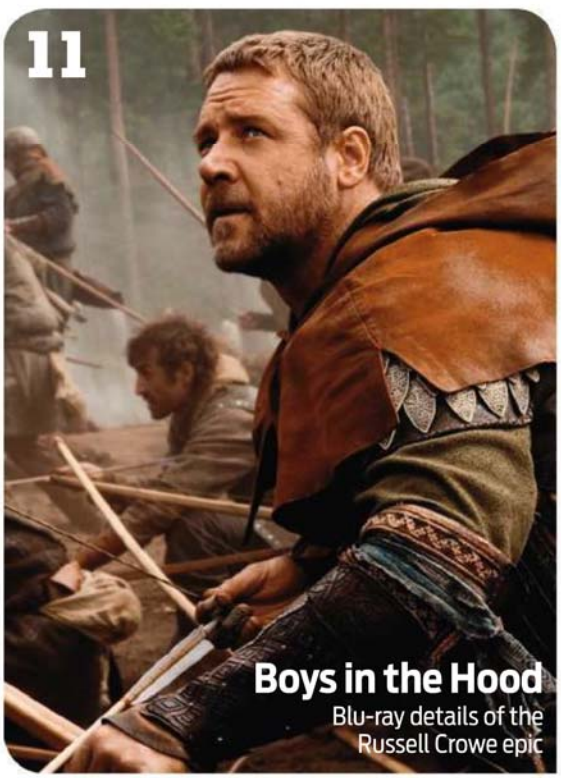
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Equipment reviewed in *Home Cinema Choice* is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase

CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Adam Rayner: The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson: Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal *ERT*



John Archer: The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early *HCC* staffer

Alvin Gold: Audiophile Alvin also reviews regularly for ou sister mag, *Hi-Fi Choice*



Martin Pipe: Technology specialist Martin co-developed *HCC*'s Tech Lab operation



Adrian Justins: Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*





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BULLETIN

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Speakers' corner

Mission MX Series → www.mission.co.uk



Designed from the ground up by audio legend Peter Comeau and promising 'maximum sound for minimum outlay', Mission's affordable MX Series loudspeakers launch in August. The range includes the MX-1 (£150 per pair) and MX-2 (£200) standmount speakers; MX-3 (£350), MX-4 (£500) and MX-5 (£600) floorstanders, plus the compact MX-S (£120) and the MX-C1 (£130) and MX-C2 (£180) centres. Active subwoofers will be joining the lineup at a later date.

HCC Online...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

ARC angel

Yamaha RX-V767 → http://uk.yamaha.com

Promising the introduction of 'a cutting-edge class of receiver for a new era of home cinema entertainment', Yamaha is clearly keen to make a splash with its flagship 3D-enabled AVR. On paper, this £600 AVR has plenty to recommend it including: 3D and Audio Return Channel support over 6-in/2-out HDMI; revamped Cinema DSP with virtual presence channels; 7x 95W amplification; a brand new GUI and automatic room acoustics optimisation, which the company claims will 'revolutionise receiver installation'.

Partner with...

Crystal Acoustics BPT5-10BL
Bipolar 5.1 system, £600 approx



While this stylish home cinema speaker package is clearly designed to partner modern flatscreen TVs, it doesn't shirk serious audio duties. Each of its four tallboy speakers uses a bipolar driver arrangement, with a rear-firing mid/bass driver helping to create a widely dispersed soundfield. Joining these in the system is a timbre-matched centre channel speaker and the THX Select-certified 120W THX-10SUBt subwoofer.
www.crystalaudiovideo.com

Gearing up for 3D



Denon is expanding its Universal Blu-ray player lineup with two 3D-ready models. The £400 DBP-1611UD (available August) and £600 DBP-2011UD (pictured, available September) will support both 3D Blu-ray playback and YouTube streaming via a firmware update later in the year. The company has loaded both decks with such high-end tech as audio quality circuitry with dedicated two-channel output, high-bitrate video processing, DLNA 1.5-certified networking and 1GB internal memory.
www.denon.co.uk

Sanyo bigs it up



Sanyo's forthcoming high-end projector, the PLV-HF10000L has a native 2K resolution (2048 x 1080) and employs an edge-blending function, so that images from several projectors can be merged into one mega display. It also features a 3,000:1 contrast ratio and uses QuaDrive technology to separately control yellow light within the optical engine. Naturally, it's geared more towards commercial use, but interested parties will be able to grab one this November at what we imagine will be a fairly hefty price.
http://uk.sanyo.com

3D red letter day



Sky+HD subscribers with the top channel and HD pack will have a lot more to watch on their 3DTVs after Sky launches Europe's first dedicated 3D channel on 1 October. Sky 3D's opening weekend will feature Ryder Cup coverage, plus the 3DTV debuts of *Monsters vs Aliens* and *Bolt* (pictured). In the runup to Christmas, the satcaster is also promising the likes of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, *Coraline*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and *My Bloody Valentine*, plus arts shows and sports.
www.sky.com/3D

Six degrees of metadata

How the traditional EPG is failing users and content providers

'Electronic programme guides are storefronts, storefronts selling your content and they're doing a really bad job of it... It's criminal!' That's the message Colin Dixon, senior advisory partner for analyst and market strategy firm, The Diffusion Group, had for film studio representatives at a recent event hosted by content management specialist, Rovi.

Dixon was on hand to discuss existing EPG systems and the metadata that underlies them, with particular emphasis on Video on Demand content, and he was less than impressed with what he had seen. The vast majority of current EPGs, such as the Sky Guide that he used to illustrate his argument, are simple grid systems that have their roots in technology originally developed by a company called VideoGuard in 1995 for use with around 20 channels. But these days, they are used to navigate more than 500 with very little evolution in the data that is being used to power them.

Research shows that people are turning to DVD-by-mail and streaming rental services such as LOVEFiLM because, he believes, existing EPGs just aren't effective enough for users. 'We find that users are watching at most 20 of those 500 channels. Does that really mean that there are no shows on the others that they would want to watch? No, they just can't find them,' he explained.

The major issue, he claims, is the quality of the metadata driving the systems. The simple grid and occasional search functions simply don't go deep enough to help users find material they're looking for. 'With friends you do this chain: 'I saw a great movie with that guy, who was in that movie with Angelina Jolie, where there was lots of shooting.' You have to work back up the chain to get to the movie you wanted to talk about. That's how the human mind works... It's like that game, Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon.'



Colin Dixon, The Diffusion Group, says a lack of metadata is hurting EPGs

The metadata has to be much deeper than what is currently offered and should include info on actors, music, screenshots, cover art and the ability to link content.

But Dixon believes that in the UK there is at least one ray of light both from the upcoming set-top box from Virgin Media and TiVo. 'I talk to the TiVo guys a lot. They have features that identify potential likes and dislikes... preferences to help people find things within that system to watch. This could help Virgin VOD a lot, because you've got a system that gathers preference information and will aid in automatically searching the material. But only if the data's right.'



EPG guides: Lack vital info

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Inception (IMAX)



It takes a massive screen to contain all the ideas in Christopher Nolan's cerebral action fest. Best seen at IMAX, though, just to hear Zimmer's score at a gazillion watts! *SM*

2 Burning Bright (R2 DVD)



If you only watch one film about an autistic boy and his hot teenage sister, trapped in a house with a killer tiger this year, make sure it's this one. *CJ*

3 Moon (R2 DVD)



The Eighties-style electronica is sublime on a surround sound system. *JL*

4 Predator: Ultimate Edition (All-region BD)



Great soundtrack, original story and massive guns. What's not to like about this 80s actioner? *MC*

5 Angel: Seasons 1-5 (R2 DVD)



Revisiting this Buffy spin-off recently reminded me not only how uneven it could be, but also how – when firing on all cylinders – it was possibly better than its big sister. *AvB*

Demo'd!

The AV highlights of... *War of the Worlds* on Blu-ray

Up from the depths



21.09: As the first Martian tripod emerges from the ground you get a taste of the unbelievably deep and powerful LFE present in this Blu-ray's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix. Definitely one for bass lovers everywhere.

Going underground



38.48: Steven Spielberg demonstrates just how vital sound is to telling a story with this cacophony of thunderous spatial effects accompanying the bright lights.

Crash landing



41.56: While Paramount's AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode accurately reflects the heavily stylised aesthetics of *War of the Worlds* to the point where detailing isn't always brilliant, it certainly shines in these long shots of the wrecked plane.

Panic on the streets



59.20: In this scene, the ominous bass-rich tone of the Martian, er, foghorn, leads to a mad panic to board the final ferry across the Hudson River. Once again, the Blu-ray triumphs with a detailed image that picks out the crowding masses, and more expertly-rendered sonics.

Video cam will shoot in 3D

Panasonic unveils new camcorder, and confirms new 3D plasmas

One of the biggest problems dogging the takeup of 3DTVs is the lack of stereoscopic content currently available to view on them. However, Panasonic believes it has the perfect solution in the form of its first-ever domestic 3D camcorder, the HDC-SDT750, which opens up a whole new world for home video enthusiasts, while simultaneously removing 3DTV's dependence on commercially produced software.

Due to arrive this Autumn, priced around £1,300, the HDC-SDT750 is actually an adaptation of Panasonic's existing HS700 with a brand new, removable 3D lens appendage. And while it only records 3D video using the (passive) side-by-side technique (960 x 1080 pixels), having recently had an exclusive hands-on with the camcorder, *HCC* is convinced that the clarity of the image is still good enough to create engaging 3D images.

As the 3D lens is quite large, we found a greater issue to be one of physical balance. However, after several minutes of use, we quickly adapted to it and restored the equilibrium by cradling the unit. Shooting in 3D mode also results in the disabling of the zoom facility, which can be a little frustrating, and the fixed lens assembly means that users have no control over the level of depth in the image. That said, as a true point-and-shoot 3D device, the HDC-ST750 is very easy to use.

The camera shoots 2D full HD in AVCHD format and has a neat 5.1 audio recording mode that uses five mics to create a standard L/C/R and surround sound stage. It also ships with PC-only software allowing users to edit footage in its native 3D.



Laurent Abadie, CEO of Panasonic Europe, says smaller 3D plasma panels are in the pipeline

'After the shock of *Avatar* last December, 3D became a trigger for everything; for gaming, for movies for broadcast stations,' Laurent Abadie, Panasonic's European CEO told *HCC*.

'Demand for the VT20 50in plasma is far, far, far above our highest expectation. We introduced it in April this year, but demand has been three times higher than availability.'

And while he admits that the company's 3D range is fairly small at the moment, this will all change at the 2010 IFA tech expo. 'You will see a lot of new products. Following the launch of our 65in 3D plasma model, we will have 46 and 42in models... a full range. We will also show a 153in 4K2K 3D model. The price is £400,000,' he teases 'and we already have orders. It's incredible!'

However, one major area of consumer concern remains the 3D glasses themselves and, according to Abadie, it's an area that the company is keen to revisit. 'We will introduce many glasses in two or three months,' he revealed, adding, 'with better quality and that are more comfortable, especially for people who already wear glasses.'



Point and shoot: the 3D HDC-ST750 is easy to use

The bitch is back



Alien Anthology will hit the UK on 25 October. This epic six-disc Blu-ray boxset features all four films, plus more than 60hrs of bonus material, including content from the previous *Legacy* and *Quadrilogy* DVD sets and exclusive new material. The latter includes Sigourney Weaver's original screen test for *Alien*, recently rediscovered deleted scenes and the previously unseen original cut of *Wreckage and Rage: The Making of Alien3*. The discs also feature five hours of Enhancement Pods with behind-the-scenes footage and raw dailies.
www.fox.co.uk

Nightmare on BD



Earlier this year Freddy Krueger became the latest horror icon to be re-imagined for a new generation. Warner Home Video is bringing its new take on *A Nightmare on Elm Street to* DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on 25 October, in time for Halloween. While details are few, we understand that the Blu-ray will be a Triple-Play Edition featuring a BD, DVD and Digital Copy of the film, and the Blu-ray disc itself will include an alternate opening and ending; deleted scenes; a *Freddy Krueger Reborn* featurette and a Maniacal Movie Mode viewing option.
www.warnerbros.co.uk

HD apocalypse



Lionsgate will be bringing Coppola's legendary *Apocalypse Now* to Blu-ray in the US on 19 October in both 2 and 3-disc sets. Both promise to include the original 1979 theatrical cut and the later Redux version of the film presented in the original 2.35:1 ratio with DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Plentiful extras include interviews, additional scenes and eight featurettes, while the triple disc version adds a 48-page booklet, storyboard and, best of all, the *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* documentary, presented in full HD. We hope they come to the UK very soon.
www.lionsgate.com

Boys from the Hood

Robin Hood: Director's Cut
Universal Pictures
R2 DVD & All-region BD



Ridley Scott reunites with his *Gladiator* star, Russell Crowe, for another historical action epic, this time tackling the legend of England's most famous outlaw. Released in the UK on 20 September, both the DVD and Blu-ray feature the original theatrical cut alongside a brand new Director's Cut boasting 17 minutes of previously unseen footage. The two-disc BD is also packed with bonus features, including an interactive Director's Notebook mode, deleted scenes and an hour-long *Making of...* documentary.

Pick'n'Mix



Filmmaker Tom Six chooses his five favourite DVDs...

1 Salo
I saw this when I was teenager and it made a huge impression on me. The most politically incorrect film ever made.

2 La Grande Bouffe
The general idea is great. Four decadent men eat themselves to death in contrast to the horror of the kids dying of hunger in Africa.

3 The Idiots
This 'small digital' movie for me is larger than life. The idea of letting it all go is so liberating. Von Trier is a very daring director.

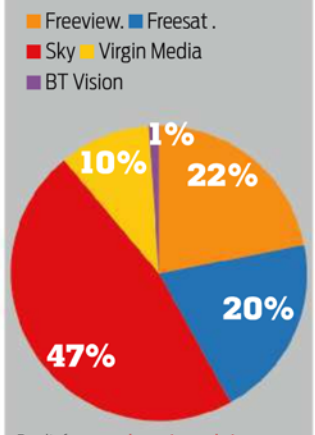
4 Fitzcarraldo
The fact that they dragged that ship over that hill without any CGI makes this film a cinematic masterpiece for me.

5 Borat
The only movie where I couldn't stop laughing.

Tom Six started his career in TV as one of the pioneer directors for *Big Brother* in the Netherlands. In 2001, he and his sister founded Six Entertainment and started writing and directing feature films, including *Gay*, *Honeyz* and *I Love Dries*. His latest, the controversial shocker *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*, is currently playing at cinemas nationwide and will hit Blu-ray and DVD in the UK this October.

We asked...

Which of these TV platforms do you watch most frequently?



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Humax aims high with HD

HCC samples feature-packed premium Freeview HD recorder

It's been a long time coming, but Humax's debut Freeview HD PVR will have hit shelves by the time you read this. While we'll have a full review for you in our next issue, *HCC* has already had the chance to sample the HDR-FOX T2 set-top box during a recent visit to the company's UK HQ, and our first impressions were that it's definitely been worth the wait.

The recorder houses twin DVB-T2 tuners and a 500GB hard drive – a step up from the brand's Freesat+ machine, which relies on a 320GB HDD. *HCC* was told that this is because there's more HD content available now, so people will increasingly want to record it.

'There's even potential for larger models,' teased Graham North, Humax' commercial director. Still, if the current version isn't big enough for you, there's always the option to save recordings on to an external USB device.

This might sound like a typical PVR so far, but the HDR-Fox T2 also offers a raft of eye-catching extra features. These include: Sky Player and BBC iPlayer VOD functions (later in the year), multimedia file copying/playback via USB and home networking via Ethernet. Indeed, if you already own the brand's non-PVR Freeview HD receiver, the HD-FOX T2, you can connect it to this unit and play back its recordings.

Exactly which media files the unit will support still hadn't been finalised when *HCC* saw the machine in action (although MP3 and JPEG were confirmed). However, we were informed that the manufacturer 'will be testing different video formats and will compile a list of supported/tested formats to make available on our website'.



Graham North, Humax's commercial director, wants the boxes demonstrated in stores

In addition to the usual PVR trick-play function, the HDR-Fox T2 will even let you stream one recording while watching another, or even record two HD channels if they're on the same multiplex, while watching a third. But perhaps the most impressive element is its fast and very intuitive user interface. Browsing the EPG, searching recordings and calling up files on USB or from a network involved none of the five-second pauses and menu overshooting that afflict many boxes.

While we're sure that the HDR-FOX T2's enhanced features look destined to cement Humax's status as one of the UK's leading set-top box brands, North revealed that this can also cause problems at retail. 'We're trying to work out with major retailers how they're going to demo connected TV products. They don't know how to yet', he told *HCC*. Another Humax spokesperson added, 'the first stumbling block is getting a store to plug our box into a TV'.



PVR plus: twin DVB-T2 tuners

Play and receive



Marantz has finally revealed its latest single-box Blu-ray player and 2.1-channel receiver. Dubbed the M-ER803, the pint-sized powerhouse system delivers 2x 70W, features 1080p/24fps Blu-ray playback via HDMI and offers a USB input with iPod digital interface. The system also features a new GUI that should make installation foolproof and an X-Xport that can be used with the company's optional RX101 wireless Bluetooth audio module. Expected it to arrive in September priced around £900.
www.marantz.com

Second roomer



Loewe is adding LED backlight technology to its Connect range with its latest 26in model. With prices starting at around £1,225 (depending on the exact specifications you want), the Connect 26in LED TV features an integrated hybrid HD tuner for digital, terrestrial and cable TV reception, an Ethernet port, a side-mounted USB port, two HDMI inputs and 2x 10W stereo speakers. It's available in gloss black or white or chrome silver and comes with a table stand. Floor stands and wall mounts are optional extras.
www.loewe-uk.com

Projector cuts



If you want to invest in a new projector for your home cinema setup, then you have more reason than ever to check out Optoma's award-winning ThemeScene range. The company has just cut the price of two of it full HD projectors: the HD82 has been cut by £200 to £2,000, while the HD86 (pictured) drops an impressive £600 to £2,800. Both projectors use TI DarkChip3 DLP tech with PureMotion frame interpolation in the former and the second-generation PureMotion2 and CMS Colour Control in the latter.
www.optoma.co.uk

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

News x10



1 Samsung's 3D coordinates

Samsung has revealed a range of high-end home cinema components designed to partner its flagship 9000 LED 3DTVs. Dubbed THE 9 Series, the system comprises a 7.1 home cinema package and unique pedestal 3D Blu-ray player.

2 Too broad a Canvas

Just when things were looking rosy for the BBC-led VOD venture, Project Canvas, Virgin Media has filed a complaint with Ofcom claiming that it is 'anti-competitive' and that 'the Canvas partners have significantly exceeded their original claims to be creating a common set of standards, which could be improved upon by others, and are now intent on controlling every aspect of how people watch TV.'

3 100GB BD disc a reality

Sharp has become the first company to release a triple-layer 100GB Blu-ray disc in the new BDXL format. Sadly, the company can't guarantee that the discs will work in existing Blu-ray decks, so you'll have to buy dedicated BDXL kit if you want to start archiving many hours of HD material onto them.

4 Auf wiedersehen, pet

Loewe is citing higher procurement costs and price adjustments as the reasons for a loss of almost €5m during the second quarter of the year. As a result, Frieder C Löhrer has resigned as CEO, stating, 'we did not accomplish everything we had planned in recent months. I accept personal responsibility for this.'

5 Slow web access in UK

According to a recent 'State of the Internet' report by digital operating environment pioneers, Akamai, the UK ranks 27th in the world in terms of average broadband connection speeds. We only managed an average of 5.3Mbps, some distance behind Hong Kong at 9Mbps and Korea with 12Mbps. We even rank behind the averaged 6.3Mbps of Romania and Latvia.



6 Movies on tap

Samsung has become the latest manufacturer to announce a deal with Acetrax to bring a movie streaming service via its latest LED TVs and BD decks, enabling users to rent or buy movies from the first independent pan-European connected movie service. There are currently around 2,000 DVD-quality films available through Acetrax, each costing around £3.50 to rent and £11 to buy.

7 ITV moves to pay TV

In an effort to tackle dwindling advertising revenue, ITV has announced that forthcoming HD versions of its ITV2, ITV3 and ITV4 channels will only be available through Sky's subscription service. This move to pay TV marks the first steps in a plan that ITV's CEO, Adam Crozier, claims will eventually see the broadcaster 'move to a position whereby half of ITV's revenue will be derived from non-TV advertising sources'.

8 Painful 3D

A recent study by the UK charity The Eyecare Trust, claims that around 12 per cent of the population cannot see stereoscopic 3D effects due to poor binocular vision. Reportedly, more than one in 10 of us 'has a visual impairment that means our brains are unable to correctly process the individual images that are transmitted to it via our left and right eyes', which can also lead to screen fatigue and headaches when viewing 3D. So, check your eyes before you buy a 3DTV.

9 World Cup winner

While the 2010 World Cup might not have lived up to England fans' expectations, it certainly delivered for the AV industry. According to the market researchers at GfK, in the three months up to the end of June year-on-year sales of LCD TVs were up 11.6 per cent and plasmas up 14.9 per cent, with a third of all screens sold in June being 37in or bigger.

10 Blue movies

Whenever a new video technology comes along, people always claim that it will only succeed if the adult film industry gets behind it and 3D is no different. At the launch of its debut 3D camcorder (p10), even Panasonic's CEO, Laurent Abadie, told *HCC* that 'the adult industry will be very important for 3D'. The upcoming release of Hustler's *This Ain't Avatar XXX* should be interesting then. It's a mega-budget porno spoof of the sci-fi epic, shot in 3D and featuring blue-painted, adult stars getting frisky with each other.

Web chat

What's going down on our website? This issue: 3D early adopters...



Lack of brains

'Early adopters are suffering from a lack of brains and obviously have money to burn! Buying a 3DTV when there's no software is like buying a car that runs on a fuel that doesn't exist! Why would you? Why?'

I'm happy with 2D

'Early adopters sometimes need their heads examining! 3D in the cinema and for gaming, if you must, but otherwise I'll continue to take mine in happy, healthy, cheaper, non-ghosting and above all massively-available 2D.'

Jealousy?

'Why do people always dis the early adopter? I have a nice 63in 3DTV parking its shiny butt in my cinema right now... Might have touched that envy nerve again!'

3D will be dead soon

'The studios are going to kill 3D with these exclusivity deals. Content is king in the home cinema market and by the end of the year there is still going to be only a handful of titles available. Add this to the continuing extra charge at cinemas (and people not paying to see post-production tacked-on 3D) and 3D will be dead before the end of 2011.'

Software shortage? Don't think so

'I recently bought the panny 3DTV. I have *Ice Age 3*, *Coraline*, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, *Monsters vs Aliens* (from eBay for $40), and *Imax 3D: Grand Canyon Adventure* from Amazon Germany. I also have four 3D games on the PS3.

Bearing in mind 3D is only something to watch as a special 'sit down and draw the curtains' event two or three times a week, this is more than enough at the moment. In fact I haven't even got around to watching *Coraline* or *Cloudy* yet. And Sky goes live in September, so what's the problem?'

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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson bemoans the loss of the AV dealer now that online outlets are prevailing, and urges readers to support their high street retailer

The UK hi-fi and home cinema industry is in a bit of a pickle. Sevenoaks and Audio T, the last remaining mid-to-high end AV retail chains, have announced they are merging. Details of how this will manifest on the high street are scarce and subject to a period of 'joint marketing and purchasing' to test the water. But it could mean that in towns where both chains have a presence, one of the shops is going to be axed.

The high street retailer in almost every consumer sector is feeling the pinch from the declining spend on leisure and luxury goods plus competition from various online channels. The latter is no bad thing in some respects, of course. Fierce price wars on the net can lead to big savings for you and I, the humble consumer. Unfortunately, though, it is a rather short-term benefit that is actually leading to limited choice, poor service, and a critical shortage of reliable information and expertise at the point of purchase.

Changing times

Time was when reviewers and magazine editors would rarely say definitively that one product was better than another or make hard and fast recommendations. We would listen, evaluate and 'short list' recommended products, which the reader could then sample at his local retailer before making his final decision. That would be a pointless exercise today. There simply aren't enough dealers left to assume there will be a comprehensively stocked AV outlet anywhere near the reader.

Without the retailer resource, those looking to find help and advice on the relative performance merits of AV products have two portals of wisdom to turn to: specialist journals and public opinion. Both are flawed oracles.

We all know that opinion aired on forums can be biased, skewed or just plain ridiculous. Many forum posters recommend equipment and announce that it is the 'best ever' simply to justify their own decision and expenditure. And exactly how many other similar products have they experienced to make any sort of comparison? While forums are a rich source of information, there is no 'editor' to control what is decent, honest, legal or even truthful.

Then you have magazine reviews both in print and online. While there is an editor and the reviewers are professionals with great experience of what the market has to offer (I have just reviewed my 200th AV amplifier, for example), the process is not perfect. When I review an amplifier, it is within the context of my source and loudspeaker equipment, at the behest of the acoustics of my listening room, with my taste in movies and, most importantly, using my ears.

While my ears are, of course, 24-carat gold and kept overnight in a dehumidified safe on a velvet cushion, **like any pair of human shell-likes they are subject to variations**. One's health, the time of day, quality of the wine, family and work pressures, general mood and personal preferences can all influence one's holistic opinion of a piece of AV equipment.

I'm certainly not denigrating my own work or that of any of my reviewer colleagues. We all have a lot of solid experience within our relevant product specialisations and can offer very worthy opinions of a product's relative merits. In fact, without being able to watch, listen or use a product yourself before purchase, there is no better buying guide than a professional review.

That said, a subjective critique simply cannot offer the insight and real-world opinion you will form by going to a dealer's demo room and listening to the product for yourself.

C'mon people, we really need our hi-fi and AV dealers. Use 'em or lose 'em

Are high street dealerships just dinosaurs from a pre-web age? Let us know what you think: email hcc@futurenet.com



Richard Stevenson has bequeathed his ears to the nation and has asked that they are auctioned off to help vagrant ex-AV dealers

ILLUSTRATION: BY TEKURA MAEVA



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TIME MACHINES

This month, **Martin Pipe** fills us in on teletext, the British innovation that will fade into history when the analogue TV transmitters are switched off

Back in the early Seventies, eagle-eyed TV viewers may have spotted a row of tiny flashing dots at the top of their pictures. At the time, little did they know that they were glimpsing an innovation of British electronics. These dots were the analogue residue of an experimental digital information service, which would include news headlines, weather, subtitles for the hard of hearing (quite a challenge for live programmes!) and special interest pages (recipes, travel, record reviews, gardening and business information like stock prices). This was exciting at a time when there were no home computers, let alone public Internet access.

Each of those dots are pulses that each carry one bit of digital information - black for 0, and white for 1 - and several composed a character (letter, number or symbol). A decoder extracted the digital data from the four lines carrying the information, which was repeated cyclically with 'headers' to identify a specific 'page'. The decoder assembled these pages, which were arranged in 24 rows of 40 characters. Pages were selected by the users via a numeric keypad; owing to the carousel-like arrangement in which pages were transmitted, users often had to wait a while until the selected page appeared.

The decoder would go to an 'index page' (a bit like a web browser's homepage) when the feature was invoked. The index page would usually list the numbers of other popular pages. Very crude colour graphics, composed of block characters, were supported. These were intended for weather maps, but over time, artists learnt to be surprisingly creative with the primitive technology. Basic error-correction was provided, but you still needed a decent aerial for reliable reception.

The engineering teams of the BBC and IBA were independently working on their own information services, which became respectively known as 'Ceefax' and 'Oracle'. In 1974, they agreed on a common standard that became universally known as 'teletext', although the broadcaster-specific branding lasted into the 1990s. Oracle disappeared in late 1992 to be replaced by Teletext Ltd that provided advertisement-supported teletext for ITV and C4.

By 1976, the standard had been upgraded to support features such as double-sized characters. Back in 1975, a full Ceefax magazine (of which there could be eight) contained a mere 100 pages. To provide material for them, the BBC dedicated an editorial team to its BBC1 and BBC2 Ceefax services. Today's average mobile phone has far more power and memory at its disposal than the DEC minicomputer they were using.

In 1977, an estimated 6000 teletext 'terminals' were in use, but by 1983, there were 1.5m sets in the UK. Teletext decoders were being built as standard or could be affordably retrofitted. **The decoder technology improved considerably during this decade, thanks to the ubiquitous microprocessor.** 'Computer-controlled teletext' was a feature of upmarket sets, notably those from Philips. Memory became so cheap that an entire magazine could be stored, for instant access to a specific page. And because it relies on the decoder being in the TV rather than the set-top box (some enthusiast-grade satellite receivers have teletext decoders) recordings won't be ruined by a quick check of the cricket scores.

Fast-forward nearly 40 years, though, and teletext, while still available on digital satellite, has been eclipsed by 'red button' digital teletext. What was a British technology success story will fade into history when the analogue TV transmitters are switched off for the last time. We'll all miss what was a first glimpse of the 'information age'

Do you have any amusing anecdotes about early teletext? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com



Martin Pipe says today's flashing dots before the eyes are more likely to be attributable to a heavy night's drinking



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TECH TANTRUM

Barry Fox takes to the airwaves to find out how Russian helicopters hold the key to digital TV switchover

Digital UK, the trade body created to switch us all from analogue to digital TV, has been doing a good job recently of explaining the enormousness of the task.

The UK's analogue terrestrial service currently covers 98.5 per cent of the population, but is being progressively switched off. At the same time the low power Freeview transmitters, which currently deliver a pretty weak digital TV signal to 77.8 per cent of the UK, are being upgraded. By 2012, 98.5 per cent of households will be getting all-digital signals, which are 10 times stronger than existing Freeview.

All this work involves continually juggling the terrestrial digital frequencies to avoid interfering with other British transmitters and our European cousins. Hence the national and local Freeview retunes that are such a nuisance for viewers.

But the end result of upping the power tenfold will be that mobile TV reception for iPods and phones will finally become possible. We shall also get HD Freeview all across the country, not just for today's lucky 50 per cent.

None of this comes cheap. The BBC is using over £800m of licence fee money to educate the public and help the old and disabled.

The broadcasters are paying network operator Arqiva £700m to upgrade over 1,150 transmitters. Most of the towering masts have to be strengthened to support the extra antennae needed for the higher power.

London's 5m homes are served by the Crystal Palace transmitter. It's a top security blockhouse, but Digital UK got a privileged few tech journalists inside for a look-see.

The existing analogue TV transmitters feed 80kw of power up the 720-foot mast through massive water-cooled, coaxial cable. Several TV channels are combined into one signal feed by room-sized versions of the 3dB couplers that Maplin sell for a quid.

The filters needed to keep the signal stable are like oil drums, internally tuned by metal plates that are fine-adjusted with a spanner. At the slightest mis-tuning, the blockbuster radio frequency energy would turn the whole rig to red-hot coals.

Getting new digital antennae the size of several large cars up the mast normally takes weeks of rope winching. But the job can now be done in a day, using super-stable helicopters with contra-rotating blades that were originally built in Russia to hunt NATO submarines. The choppers are leased out of Switzerland and Norway with hawk-eyed crews trained to lower an antenna block onto a mast tip for manual bolting.

Cold War angst

The Crystal Palace aerials are being winched up, though, because the sight of a Russian helicopter doing balancing tricks near busy roads might cause pile-ups.

Says Peter Heslop, director of Digital Switch Over at Arqiva, 'The summers of 2007, 2008 and 2009 were amongst the wettest on record, and you can't work on top of a mast in driving rain. But there are some things we didn't bargain for.

'Work on the mast at Skelmersdale was held up when a local resident discovered that a Grasshopper Warbler bird was nesting there. We had to stop all work until 31 August when the birds had flown.'

It's good to know that the people in charge of the digital switchover do seem to know what they're doing, and that they understand the importance of explaining it all to the likes of us. If only every company thought the same way...

Do you have any Switchover horror stories to share? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com

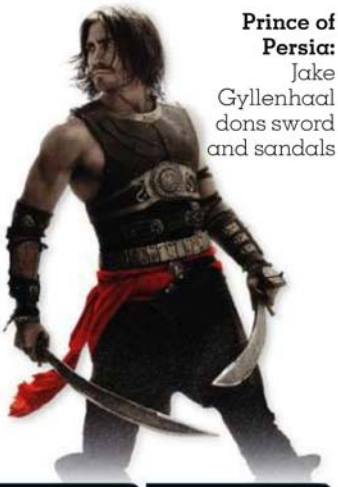


Barry Fox
Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Don't be surprised if Barry Fox turns up in a helicopter offering to adjust your TV aerial...

ILLUSTRATION: BY RENÉ ANDREW

Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **Our calendar** means you don't miss out on any of the excitement



Prince of Persia: Jake Gyllenhaal dons sword and sandals

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				27 **Avatar: Special Edition** James Cameron's 3D sci-fi spectacular returns with eight minutes of *'Never Before Seen Footage'*. At Digital 3D cinemas across the UK from today. **www.avatarmovie.com/release**		
30 **Four Lions** *Brass Eye* creator, Chris Morris, courts controversy once again with his feature film directorial debut about a group of hapless British jihadists. Catch it on DVD and Blu-ray from today.			**2** **Happy Birthday!** Multi-talented Mexican actress, director and producer Salma Hayek turns 44 today. Why not celebrate by checking out her iconic bikini-clad snake dance in *From Dusk Till Dawn*.	**3** **IFA 2010** Europe's leading consumer electronics show returns to Berlin for another six-day marathon of high-tech, AV goodness from the world's biggest manufacturers. **www.ifa-berlin.com**	**4** **Google** Google Inc. was founded on this day in 1998 by Stanford University PhD candidates Larry Page and Sergey Brin. Today it runs more than 1,000,000 data servers around the world. **www.google.co.uk**	**5** **Black September** The terrorist attack on the Munich Olympic Games took place on this day back in 1972, and was immortalised in the documentary *One Day in September* and Steven Spielberg's thriller *Munich*.
6 **Kick-Ass** Whatever you do, don't miss out on the year's funniest and most outrageous superhero flick when it explodes onto DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today. **www.kickass-movie.co.uk**				**10** **Resident Evil: Afterlife** Milla Jovovich will be kicking ass in 3D at your local multiplex when this fourth film in the popular videogame franchise goes on general release in the UK from today. **www.residentevil-movie.com**		
23 **Glee: The Complete First Season** Get ready to sing for joy as the TV event of the year comes to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today. Both come packed with enough extras to please even the most demanding Gleek. **www.fox.com/glee**			**16** **Cambridge Film Festival 2010** Now in its 30th year, the Cambridge Film Festival returns to the Arts Picturehouse cinema and will again be showcasing the best of independent international cinema. **www.cambridgefilmfestival.org.uk**	**17** **The Horde** *Assault on Precinct 13* meets *Dawn of the Dead* in this latest addition to the French new wave of horror cinema, which opens at selected screens across the UK today. **www.lahorde-ledvd.com**		
20 **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time** Today sees the UK DVD and Blu-ray release of this action-packed blockbuster starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Gemma Arterton and based on the popular videogames. **http://adisney.go.com/disneypictures/**	**21** **The Hobbit** Readers got their first taste of Middle-Earth when JRR Tolkien's legendary children's fantasy novel The Hobbit was first published on this day in 1937. **www.tolkien.co.uk**	**22** **CEDIA Expo 2010** The Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta plays host to this five-day US event touted as the 'number one tradeshow in the residential electronics system industry'. **www.cedia.org/expo**	**23** ***HCC* #187** Start saving your pennies. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed to the gills with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and full-on software reviews. **www.homecinemachoice.com**			

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Also look out for:



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AVR-2311

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Perception deception



Barry Fox looks at why 2D-3D conversion is causing controversy and how the tech works



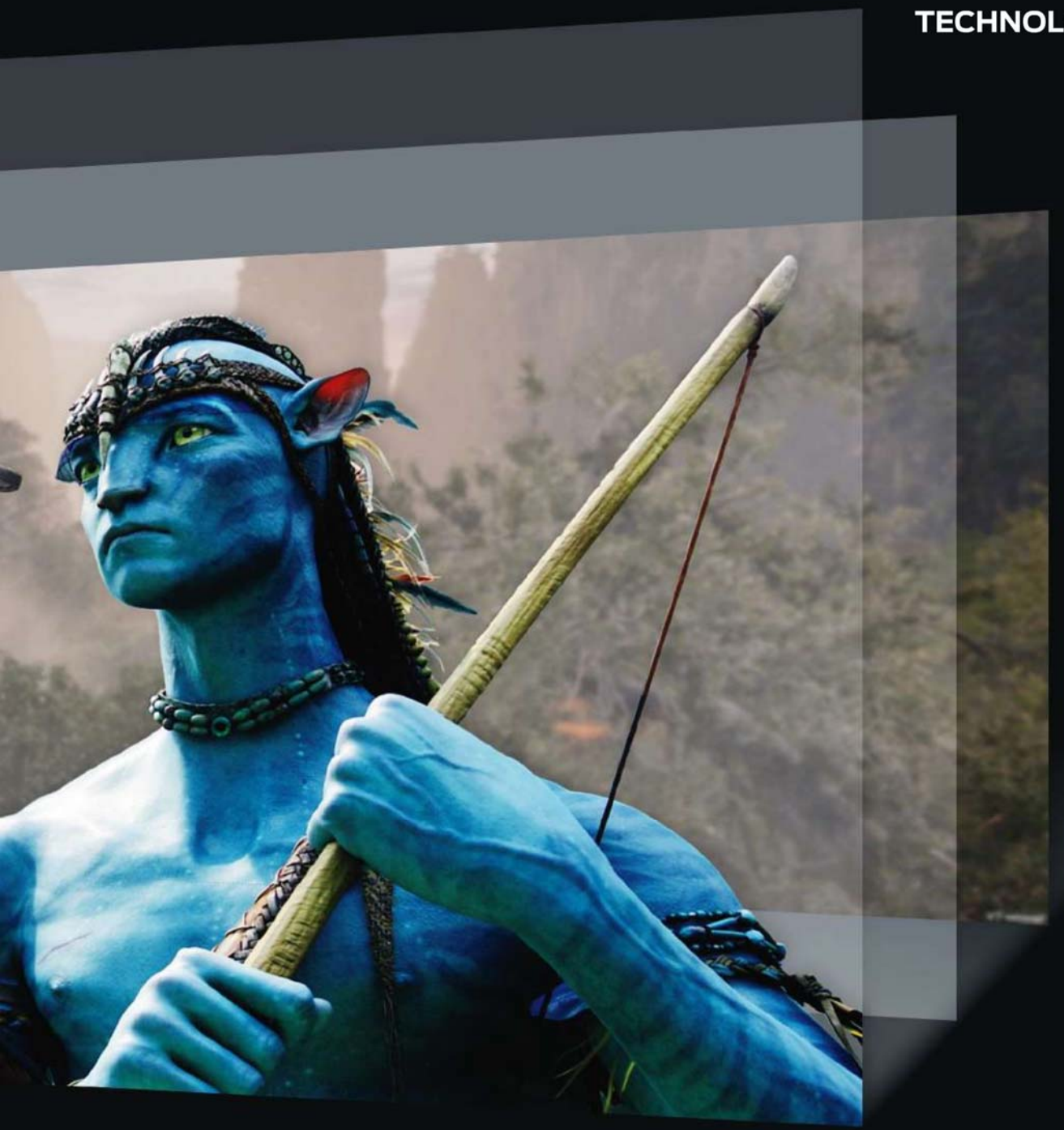
The ability to build 2D-3D converter chips into 3DTVs, as both Samsung and Sony have done, is a controversial topic – and that's because broadcasters hate it.

US sports network ESPN recently warned that if 3DTV manufacturers flood the market with converter sets, the network would rethink its commitment to filming and broadcasting 3D. This prompted Panasonic's senior vice president, Bob Perry, to send out an assurance that there would be no conversion in Panasonic's 3D screens, 'just as a sushi bar should promise never to serve fake sushi-like food'.

But the 3D world moves on apace, and seeing the sales success of Samsung's sets and publicity for tricks such as 2D camcorder conversion, Panasonic is having second thoughts.

'We don't want to be caught at a competitive disadvantage, if it's a feature that everybody else has and we don't,' explains Henry Hauser, Panasonic's vice president of merchandising in North America.

The 2D-3D conversion tool has had a mixed reception. The movie *Clash of Titans* was professionally converted by teams of engineers who worked for weeks. And it did not impress.



Samsung's TV sets convert 'on the fly' and in real time completely automatically. Demonstrations of the *Avatar* 2D Blu-ray, turned into 3D by a TV during playback, have been well received.

How does it work?

I set out to find out how conversion works, and why the results are so variable and opinions so mixed. First, I spoke with engineer and manager David Jung at Samsung's QA Lab in Hampshire.

He told me he thought '2D-3D conversion a commercial necessity.' He went on, 'when we first launched 3D in the US in March there was only one 3D title, *Monster Vs. Aliens*. There is still very little. So we offer the chance to convert 2D material to 3D. If and when there is a huge amount of content available, we may not necessarily put in the conversion function.'

Samsung's technical briefing document explains how very simple 3D conversion can be done by 'vertical location'. The image is sliced into half a dozen horizontal window zones and the zone at the bottom of the screen, which is usually the foreground, is made to come forward.

'But we did not like some of the effects,' said Jung, illustrating the point by imitating a man slumped backwards in a chair with his feet pushed forward.

So the company does a lot more. Unfortunately Samsung's technical description of what this consists of simply states that 'object-based depth processing' uses 'depth separation' and 'disparity optimisation' to create separate left and right eye images. Which is not a lot of help.

Fortunately, patents filed by Samsung and others for 3D conversion technology spill a lot of fascinating beans.

Several helpfully explain the basic challenge of building a 'depth map' from a single, flat 2D >

Plane sailing: 2D-3D conversion works by analysing the 2D image to look for depth clues, eg: how foreground objects obscure background objects, and how their relative positions change because of parallax when the camera pans across the scene

Cash cow

2D-3D converted films are still leaking out of Hollywood

1 Piranha 3-D



Alexandre Aja's pulpy, blood and babes fest (starring Elizabeth Shue, Richard Dreyfuss and Kelly Brook) has been converted in post-production to 3D by Californian company Stereoscopic FX – although it was filmed with that in mind. It should be causing a stir at your local 3D cinema right now.

2 Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I



The *Harry Potter...* movies have already made bucketfuls of cash but it seems that the lure of even more lolly proved too much for studio Warner Bros: the final two films in the series, this and ... *Deathly Hallows: Part II*, have been dimensionalised for 3D, after being shot 'flat' by director David Yates. See it in the UK from 19 November.

3 Gulliver's Travels

What could be worse than a modern day reimagining of Jonathan Swift's classic satire with Jack Black in the lead role? The same film, converted into 3D months after it finished shooting.

4 The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader



Another fantasy movie shot in 2D, but given a post-production 3D polish, this third *Narnia* flick will arrive 10 December in Blighty, and try to do as much business as possible before sci-fi sequel *Tron: Legacy* (filmed in 3D) arrives a week later.

image. Individual objects in a scene, such as people, trees and buildings, must first be isolated. This is done by rotoscoping (tracing the shape of an object in every frame of the movie), or matting (using the characteristic colour, brightness or motion of an object to construct a tightly fitting mask that follows it around).

The relative depths of the isolated objects are then estimated to create the 'depth map'. There is no single magic bullet; it has to be done by looking for 'depth clues' in the flat 2D image.

For instance, where one object is positioned in front of another and blocks out part of the more distant object, if the camera pans sideways the objects move differently, depending on their distance from the camera. There is often a difference in focus and clarity between near and far objects. The relative size of different objects tells a tale too; so can comparisons between several views of the same scene.

How it began

The first serious work on movie conversion was done in 1998 by In-Three Inc of California. The company scanned 2D film into a computer and cloned it to produce two identical picture sequences. One of these (for the left eye) remained untouched, while a human operator worked laboriously on the other, manually drawing round the edges of key objects in each scene, visually judging their depth and slightly altering their relative positions to create the equivalent of 3D footage shot with a camera pair.

'Unfortunately, even with the technology as it is, computer software to accomplish such a task does not yet exist', the inventors admitted back then. Human brains find it easy to recognise a bunch of bananas against a yellow background, but a computer can't.

A computer can also be confused between panning shots of stationary objects and static shots of moving objects, or reflections in a glass windscreen.

Electronics giant, Thomson, admitted only last year that computer-generated results still need checking by humans, and Sky is saying the same today. The broadcaster will only put out converted material, such as 3D adverts, if they have come from a professional production house that uses skilled humans to check the machine conversion.

As Sky's Chief Engineer Chris Johns emphasises, 'the technology is just not there to let it work without human involvement.'

Manufacturers like Samsung can, however, take advantage of tricks that modern TVs already perform very well. For instance, a 3D converter can add pixels to fill holes left when an object is moved, in much the same way that interpolated pixels add detail when standard-def video is upscaled to HD.

One of Samsung's patents tells how the converter draws circular objects by detecting the difference in brightness between each side of the object's edge. So brighter 2D scenes give better 3D. Another patent tells how to improve edge detection by artificially sharpening any blurred edges.

David Jung confirms this: 'How well the system works depends on the source material. With 2D high-resolution HD material, which has a high pixel count, the 3D effect is almost perfect, as long as there are bright images and movements.

All in all, then, it is hardly surprising that Samsung's **demos of real-time 3D conversion using the 2D Blu-ray version of Avatar look impressive**.

Interestingly, when Samsung's lab demonstrated conversion to me using a live HD TV programme of several chefs cooking in a studio, the effect was good depth, because the camera was continually panning and tracking around the kitchen worktops to try to make boring shots look more interesting.

Another brand, Philips, has been the dark horse of 3D so far, but the company's patents reveal it has has been very busy, discovering a simple short cut for conversion.

Every frame of live video is built from two interlaced fields, so moving objects will be at slightly different positions in successive fields. Moving objects that are close to the camera appear to be moving faster, so their position in successive fields will be more widely spaced. If the fields are used as left and right eye images a 3D effect is magically created.

Another patent from the Dutch company reveals an intriguing way to improve conversion and avoid the kind of mistakes a computer can make. The Philips trick is to analyse the sound as well as the picture. The relative loudness of sounds and the overall surround sound field can tell whether a scene is a close-up, medium view or long shot. This helps the converter chip judge depths and avoid mistaking a noisy weapon in the distance for a squeaky toy in the foreground.

How it might develop

So, despite the protests of content producers like ESPN, it's clear that 2D-3D conversion is going to be more than a passing fad. And, like other technologies, it will most likely improve in quality. If Hollywood moves towards shooting in 3D altogether, then the 2D versions will be ideal for conversion back to 3D – as proved by the way 2D Avatar converts very well. And if 3D discs are priced higher than their 2D counterparts, 3DTV owners may well think twice about buying them, and let their TV do the work instead... ●



Clash of the Titans: Underwhelming 3D

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Home Cinema Heroes No.37



Mark Craven hails Ridley Scott for the stunning movie cuts that enrich DVDs and BDs

Scott cuts a dash

It's a near certainty that anyone reading *HCC* will have at least a couple of Ridley Scott films in their collection. Movies such as *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *Gladiator* and *Black Hawk Down* have long been revered by AV-philes for their cinematic flair, special effects and carefully crafted disc releases. Many of us are counting down the days to *Alien*'s Blu-ray release (due on 25 October) with barely contained excitement.

However, for such a highly-regarded filmmaker (and knight of the realm) Scott has been responsible for a few clunkers, too. After his first three early career successes – *The Duellists*, *Alien* and *Blade Runner* – Scott suffered a remarkable downturn in fortunes during the 1980s, churning out *Legend*, *Someone to Watch Over Me* and *Black Rain,* before making a comeback of sorts with *Thelma and Louise* in 1991. But even that smash hit was followed by more disappointing choices. How, asked film fans, could the genius behind *Blade Runner* be responsible for such average fare as *1492: Conquest of Paradise* and *GI Jane*?

Back to the future: After more than 30 years, Scott will be returning to the world of *Alien* next year



Thumbs up

Then, at the turn of the millennium, everything clicked back into place. Scott teamed up with heavyweight actor, Russell Crowe, for *Gladiator*, a film that kick-started a new era of historical epics, made an absolute ton of cash, and became a permanent fixture in the disc libraries of home cinema owners globally. A year later, came *Black Hawk Down*, a movie which then arrived on DVD with one of the most explosive surround sound mixes ever heard. In fact, it's Scott's appreciation of the home video market that makes him an obvious candidate for a Home Cinema Hero; he always seems to want to offer the best DVD or Blu-ray package possible. He isn't too precious to record a commentary, or to allow documentary cameras to roll while a movie's in production, and he often works with award-winning DVD/BD producer Charles de Lauzirika. The *Dangerous Days* documentary from the *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* release is a perfect example of a filmmaker giving the fans everything they want.

Scott will now please fans even more by moving into 3D, first by producing a short film to fulfil his link with Philips' 21:9 TVs, and then with two prequels to *Alien*, scheduled for release in 2011 and 2012. We await both them and the special edition Blu-rays with bated breath

Quintessential Ridley Scott

Kane's terminal case of indigestion in *Alien*



1 Birthing pains
After his earlier encounter with the 'facehugger', Kane doubles over in pain during dinner



2 In the dark
To give the scene real impact, Scott refused to allow the cast to know exactly what was going to happen...



3 Right in the kisser
...which paid off brilliantly as Veronica Cartwright was taken unaware and blasted in the face with fake blood



4 Baby blues
A faultless combination of staging and editing, the scene still ranks as one of the biggest shocks in cinema

Must own...



Blade Runner: The Final Cut

Warner → All-region BD 5-Disc Complete Collector's Edition (US Import) → £25 Approx

Scott's adaptation of Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has become recognised as a classic of the sci-fi genre.

03.03: The opening shot of LA's futuristic skyline has never looked more magnificent thanks to the restoration undertaken for this hi-def release.

42.02: Deckard dreams of unicorns and we all knows what that means... don't we?



Alien

R2 Definitive Edition DVD → 20th Century Fox → £13 Approx

Mixing superb production design, an excellent cast and HR Giger's trademark sexualized horrors, the film is a flawless gem that remains every bit as terrifying some 30 years after its original release.

68.21: The hunt for the full-grown Alien takes captain Dallas into the Nostromo's air ducts in this uncomfortably tense sequence.

111.50: Stripped down to her underwear, Ripley discovers that she's not the sole survivor of the Nostromo. Something else is in the escape pod.



Gladiator

Universal Pictures → All-region BD → £25 Approx

Scott's most popular film among the general public, and one where he brings his A-game to every aspect of the epic.

08.04: This Blu-ray release has issues due to the amount of digital noise reduction employed in the AVC 2.40:1 encode, which is so vigorous that it obliterates vital details.

90.00: The true horror of the gladiatorial arena comes home in this bloody re-staging of the Battle of Carthage. At least the barbarians win thanks to Maximus's tactical savvy.



Black Hawk Down

Sony Pictures → R2 3-Disc Special Edition DVD → £20 Approx

This heroic account of the attempt to rescue a group of US soldiers from Mogadishu may lack political commentary, but the realism of the combat scenes takes some beating.

48.57: An RPG brings down the US helicopter in the middle of enemy territory, and the crash is a wonderful showpiece for your home cinema setup thanks to the DVD's dynamic 5.1 audio.

79.03: The sound design once again comes to the fore during this tense street shoot-out.

Worth seeing...



Legend

Universal → R1 Ultimate Edition DVD (US Import) → £10 Approx

Tom Cruise and Mia Sara star in this fantasy epic, but its true stars are the kinky story and the fantastic Tim Curry as the horny Lord of Darkness. Scott's spectacular visuals are always a treat.

76.04: A giant, bright red demon has just stepped out of a mirror in front of our heroine and told her that she is his 'one true mate'!

97.09: The fight is an entertaining final showdown, but it demonstrates the limitations of the DD5.1 mix on this Director's Cut DVD.



Kingdom of Heaven

20th Century Fox → R2 4-Disc Director's Cut DVD → £30 Approx

Scott's longer and considerably improved cut of this historical action adventure offers epic action scenes and a more coherent story, with added time to explore its many characters.

85.15: The battle for Kerak Castle is a fine centrepiece, brought to life by the excellent anamorphic 2.35:1 transfer and thunderous DD and DTS 5.1 mixes.

143.47: The start of the siege of Jerusalem confirms Scott's talents for directing largescale action.

Avoid...



Thelma and Louise

MGM → R2 Special Edition DVD → £20 Approx

Scott confounded his critics with this deeply affecting, funny and intimate film, powered by electrifying performances from Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis in the lead roles.

104.36: 'You girls about ready to get serious'? A rather crude trucker learns to treat women a little better, as our heroines destroy the rig he was towing.

124.11: Trapped between the police and the Grand Canyon, Thelma and Louise decide to stay together forever...



G.I. Jane

Sony Pictures → R2 DVD £10 Approx

This 1997 vanity project for Demi Moore ended up as nothing more than military propaganda. So far removed stylistically from his other work, it feels more like a bad Tony Scott film than a Ridley outing.

74.13: In the film's most unpleasant and brutal sequence, Demi Moore's Lt. Jordan O'Neil is repeatedly abused through water-torture, a savage beating and even the threat of rape as part of her Navy SEALS training at the facility on Captiva Island.

Premier league picture palace



A 16-zone smarthome with six Pioneer Kuros? **Mark Craven** wagers it has to be owned by a footballer



Kit Checklist

AMX: 2 x NI-3100 Netlinx processors
AMX: 11 x NXD-500i 5in Modero wall-mounted touch panels
AMX: 3 x AMX MVP-5200i - 5.2in Modero ViewPoint wireless touch panels
AMX: 1 x NXD-700Vi – 7in Modero wall-mounted touch panel
AMX: 1 x NXD-1000Vi – 10in Modero wall-mounted touch panel
AMX: 12 x Mio R1 remotes
AMX: 22 x AMX Metreau 7-button keypads
AMX: 1 x Autopatch 16x16 Optima matrix switch, component video
Linksys: 1 x 48-port network switch with PoE
ADA: 1 x Suite 16 audio distribution
RBH: 38 MC-615 In-ceiling speakers, 8 x A-615D In-ceiling dual channel speakers; 4 x MC-5AW external speakers; 3 x MC-553 In-wall LCR Dual 2 way speaker; 4 x MC-616 In-wall LCR speaker; 1 x MCS-88 In-wall subwoofer
Cineversum: Blackwing 2 projector
Draper: Onyx Fixed projection screen
Denon: AVR2310 home cinema receiver
Denon: TU1800DAB tuner
Denon: 3 x DBP2010 Blu-ray players
Apple: 6 x iPod docks
Pioneer: 5 x PDP-5090 50in plasma TVs, 1 x PDP-6090 60in plasma TV
LG: 1 x 50in HD plasma; 2 x 42in HD plasmas; 4 x 26in HD LCD screens
Aquavision: 26in series 4 LCD screen

Do you remember the TV series *Footballers' Wives*? ITV's drama about the luxurious, money-no-object lifestyles of Premier League footballers was full of garish clothes and fast cars, and, yes, flatscreen TVs. But no one, not even the chairman of Earls Park FC, had 14 of 'em.

That's the current number of HDTVs residing in this remarkable wholehouse installation, owned by what we can only describe as a 'former Premier League international.' A six-bedroom property in the Home Counties, with a swimming pool, games room, and, of course, a dedicated cinema, it was fitted out by installation specialists Konextions.

The impressive home cinema hardware is only one part of the story, though – a serious level of system integration was required to turn the house into a *bona fide* smarthome. For this, Konextions turned to control wizards AMX.

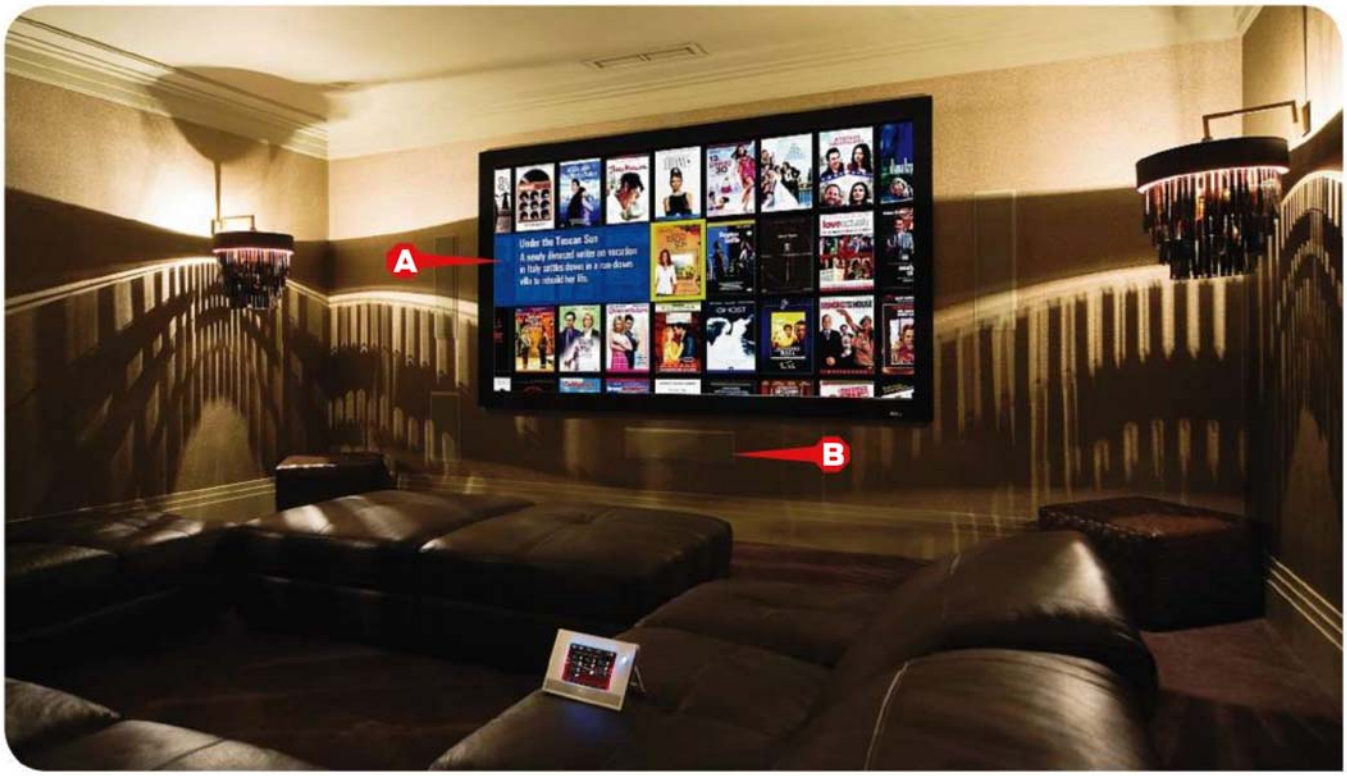
The AMX system provides precision management of all the technological elements, from AV entertainment to security, lighting and environmental control. Konextions fitted a total of 14 wall-mounted Modero touch panels, plus additional wireless panels and remote controls.

'This isn't technology for technology's sake,' Konextions' Ian Myles told me. 'The AMX system delivers real lifestyle benefits. It's robust and interfaces seamlessly with third-party systems and devices to deliver one, unified control solution. The client is so delighted that he is replicating the system in his next property.'

Projector central

Despite the owner's obvious penchant for Pioneer Kuro screens, the dedicated cinema room houses a projector, with a Cineversum Blackwing firing at a Draper Onyx fixed screen. Denon components (a DBP-2010 Blu-ray player and an AVR 2310) take care of the source material, with in-wall and in-ceiling speakers by US brand, RBH, delivering the surround sound. The room is sympathetically decorated, too, with brown leather seating and cream walls doing nothing to distract your eye from the widescreen hi-def pictures. Control in this room is by AMX's MVP-5200i wireless touchpanel, with a one-touch macro to kick the hardware into life.

Naturally, HD video isn't limited to the cinema: a 16 x 16 matrix switcher >



distributes content to all those flatscreen TVs. Multiroom audio is also made simple by ADA's Suite 16 system – and the half-dozen iPod docks scattered around.

Perfect mix

This wholehouse installation is a perfect example of how to mix smarthome tech with high quality AV. In fact, it's almost enough to make me wish I'd tried harder during PE lessons at school







A All fixed

The screen in the home's dedicated cinema room is a fixed model from Draper. It soaks up full HD images from a ceiling-mounted Cineversum Blackwing

B Heard but not seen

All the RBH speakers in the room, including the subwoofer, are housed in-wall and in-ceiling

C Touch and go

With multiple AMX touchpanels throughout the house, control of the AV, lighting and more is always at hand

D In-yer-face interface

The AMX GUI is quite straightforward to use even for tech novices

E Better safe than sorry

The NI-3100 NetLinx Controller is the nerve centre of the entire AMX solution. This rack houses not one but two of them, just in case a back-up is required at any time

The Bigger Picture

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Access all areas

Anton van Beek marvels at the myriad AV options inside one London residence

A stunning, high-tech London townhouse is now at the cutting edge of smarthome technology, thanks to the work of award-winning home automation company, Custom Controls, and in particular to the installation of Crestron's new DigitalMedia solution. This allows any analogue or digital video source – including Sky+HD, ArabSat, AppleTV, a Kaleidescape DVD server and even CCTV of the whole house – to be distributed to any room in the property over inexpensive Cat5e cables.

A combination of wired and wireless touchpanels throughout the property provides easy control over the home and all AV sources (a one-touch button activates a TV in the specific room and routes the Sky+HD receiver to it). And as the owner is a real globetrotter, the company also embedded weather feeds and local times for his various home locations onto the touchpanel home page. The installers even wrote and programmed an iPhone app, enabling the client to control AV sources from anywhere in the world.

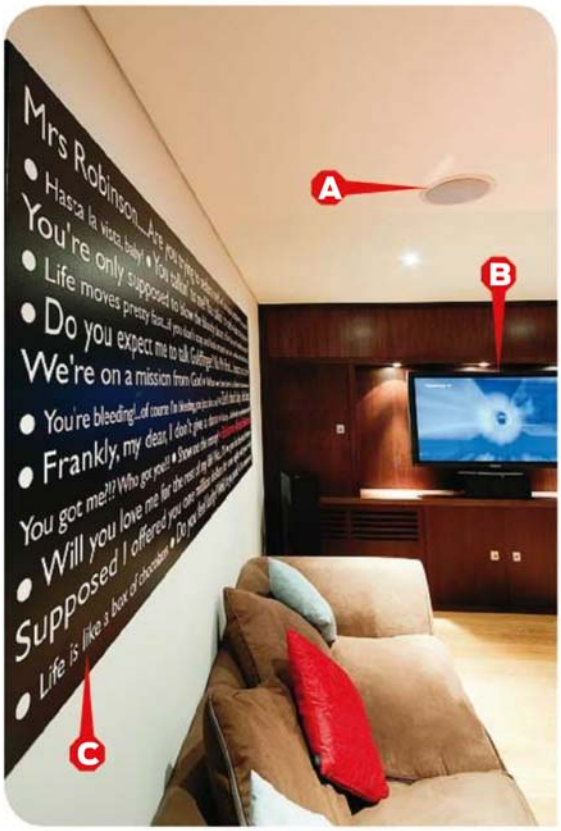
Bowers in the basement

The property basement has a dedicated home cinema room that uses the DigitalMedia system to call up films from the DVD server and HDTV content to a 50in Panasonic Pro Series plasma. While the property was already wired with in-ceiling speakers long before Custom Controls started its upgrade, something more substantial was needed for this specific space. So the company turned to industry favourites Bowers & Wilkins for a solution, and with the integration of two pre-existing in-ceiling speakers to the setup they were able to deliver a dynamic 7.1-channel audio system to go with the hi-def visuals. Amplification comes from a Denon AVR, and lighting is all managed by a Lutron system





This smarthome is all about style and sophistication







Room essentials

A Wombling free...
Installer Custom Controls made use of existing in-ceiling speakers when it set up the viewing room's 7.1 system

B Bigscreen beauty
This TH-50PF10 Panasonic plasma is a 50in model – big enough to deliver a good cinema performance if you don't want to use a projector

C You talking to me?
The owner's favourite film quotes line the cinema wall

D Touch and go
The house features a variety of wired and wireless Crestron touch controllers. This is one is sited next to what at first glance looks like a high-end kit rack – but it's actually just an oven...

E Life's good
All four bedrooms in the house feature a wall-mounted 32in LG TV

→ Kit Checklist

Equipment Room
Crestron: CP2E 2 Series control processor with Ethernet
Crestron: AAE audio expander to eight rooms
Crestron: DM16x16 16-way digital media matrix with plug-in cards
Crestron: SPW300 300W power supply
Crestron: HREL8 8-way relay for heating control
Dell: 24-port network switch
Custom Controls: Racking
Kaleidescape: KServer Mini DVD and CD server
Sky: 8x Sky+HD receivers
ArabSat: ArabSat PVR receiver
Apple: AppleTV

Home Cinema (basement)
Crestron: TPS-6X 6in radio remote control
Crestron: DM-RMC-100 room receiver/controller module
Panasonic: TH-50PF10 Professional Series 50in full HD plasma monitor
Denon: AVR-2089 7.1-channel AV receiver
Bowers & Wilkins: 2x 703 3-way floorstanders
Bowers & Wilkins: 2x DS7 on-wall surround speakers
Bowers & Wilkins: HTM7 2-way centre speaker
Bowers & Wilkins: ASW750 1000W subwoofer

All 4 Bedrooms
Crestron: DM-RMC-100 room receiver/controller module
Crestron: TPS-6L 6in wall-mounted touchpanel
LG: 32LH4000 32in LCD TV

Study (ground floor)
Crestron: DM-RMC-100 room receiver/controller module
Crestron: TPS-6L 6in wall-mounted touchpanel
LG: 26HL3000 26in LCD TV
Custom Controls: TV mounting bracket

Lounge (2nd floor)
Crestron: TPS-6X 6in radio remote control
Crestron: DM-RMC-100 room receiver/controller module
LG: 47LH4000 47in LCD TV
Custom Controls: TV mounting bracket

Kitchen (2nd floor)
Crestron: TPS-6L 6in wall-mounted touchpanel

Mezzanine (3rd floor)
Crestron: TPS-6X 6in radio remote control
Crestron: DM-RMC-100 room receiver/controller module
LG: 47LH4000 47in LCD TV
Custom Controls: TV mounting bracket

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REVIEWS

Hardware highlights **PANASONIC** 65in 3DTV and Blu-ray/Freeview HD PVR **MONITOR AUDIO** Platinum series 5.1 speakers **LG** Networking Blu-ray player and passive tech 3DTV **ORBITSOUND** Soundbar/subwoofer combi **VIVITEK** Mid-range DLP projector **SONY** Flagship 60in LED TV **GROUP TEST** Sixth stealth subwoofers put to the test **AND MUCH MORE!**



Next-gen AVRs

Looking to upgrade your receiver? Sony's STR-DH810 (p 70) and Pioneer's SC-LX83 (p44) offer cutting-edge features at different price points

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT – IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Bronzed hero wins on sheer scale

John Archer investigates whether the notion 'the bigger, the better' really does apply to 3D and finds that it does





The whole point of 3D is immersion. The technology wants to create a 'real' space for you to engage with. So it follows that if a 3D screen is big enough to fill your field of vision, it's more likely to deliver an immersive stereoscopic experience. Especially if that size is accompanied by the full HD resolution that's fuelling the new 'frame sequential' 3D push.

With this in mind, Panasonic's P65VT20 is a seriously tantalising prospect. After all, it combines the biggest yet seen on a 3D TV with full HD frame sequential playback.

What's more, it uses plasma technology, which on the evidence seen so far uses its faster response time versus LCD technology to great effect when reproducing 3D images.

The P65VT20 isn't as glamorous as I'd like, though. In spite of its bronze finish, it's a bit chunky and staid in its sculpting.

But it does have both Freeview HD and Freesat HD tuners, meaning you can get HD broadcasts regardless of where you live in the country.

The set also has the Ethernet port required by both the UK's f0ree HD broadcasting platforms for future interactive services, and this can also access DLNA PCs or Panasonic's so-so VieraCast online platform.

More multimedia strengths come via a pair of USBs and an SD card slot, with playback of photo, music and video files (including DivX HD), and even lossless recording of the TV tuners to Buffalo's JustStore Desktop HD-EU2-UK USB HDDs.

The USB ports enable you to make the TV Wi-Fi ready via a dongle that's included in the box. However, it's not as elegant a solution as a built-in system.

Pictures are driven by multiple video processing tools, such as Panasonic's powerful V-real Pro 5 3D engine and 600Hz sub-field drive for producing smoother, sharper motion handling and enhanced brightness and saturation.

Not to mention the brand's latest NeoPDP screen technology, which promises to deliver enhanced colours, black levels and sharpness, as well as an extra tweak, exclusive to the VT20 series, that reduces the plasma cell decay time – an essential improvement for tackling the dreaded 3D crosstalk phenomenon. More on this later.

Third-party endorsements abound: THX provides a well-considered picture preset, while the ISF has certified the screen as being possible to calibrate by one of their experts. This gives some idea of the level of picture tuning flexibility the P65VT20 affords. Highlights include a colour management utility; various gamma presets; the ability to adjust or deactivate the set's Intelligent Frame Creation frame interpolation system; and Panasonic's new Resolution Enhancer system for boosting the sharpness of standard-definition sources.

The TV ships with two pairs of Panasonic's 3D glasses, which feel uncomfortable rather quickly and let an annoying amount of light in. So much so, that you need to darken your room as much as possible when viewing in 3D.

Performance

This situation is reinforced by the way the TV loses considerable brightness in 3D mode versus its LCD rivals. Just lift your glasses while watching some 3D content and you'll be startled by the brightness gulf.

Just as well, then, that the P65VT20's immense black level response versus LCD rivals ensures that 3D images still look reasonably rich and dynamic.

From here on in, though, the P65VT20's 3D efforts really improve. Their single most important achievement is how little they suffer from crosstalk. The TV certainly isn't immune to the tell-tale double ghosting of objects in the mid-to-far distance; actually, **we felt the P65VT20's size made what crosstalk problems the screen does suffer more obvious than they were on the smaller 50in P50VT20**. But the issue is far less common or obvious than you find with any active LCD 3D TVs.

This immediately makes the P65VT20's 3D pictures both more convincing and less tiring to watch than those of any other 3D brand. >

AV/CV

Product: A THX-certified 65in plasma TV with frame sequential 3D

Positioning: Right at the top of Panasonic's current range

Peers: Samsung 55C9000; Sony 60LX903; LG 55LX9900

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active Full HD: YES 1080p24
Tuner: YES Freeview HD, Freesat HD, analogue
Component video: YES 1 input HDMI: 4 v1.4 HDMI input
PC input: YES 1 D-Sub Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 3 x 10W Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: 5,000,000:1
Dimensions: 1,580(w) x 967(h) x 90(d)mm Weight: 48kg
Features: 600Hz sub field drive; Video/JPEG/music playback from USB devices; left/right field switching for 3D; recording to USB HDD



HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★★ BEST BUY

Top-end picture calibration makes watching epic movies a real cinema-like experience



Full on audio: The integrated 2.1 system delivers a wide, dynamic soundstage

The reduction in crosstalk also helps the set deliver impressively on frame sequential 3D's promise of full HD resolution with 3D sources. 3D Blu-rays such as *Monsters Vs Aliens* look superbly detailed and crisp. In fact, the TV's 65in screen size helps it produce the most convincing demonstration yet of exactly why the frame sequential 'active' 3D approach is worth pursuing over the lower-res, passive method.

The P65VT20's sheer enormousness does, it must be said, ram home the resolution difference between full HD 3D Blu-rays and Sky's side-by-side 3D broadcasts. But the latter's images still look impressive for the most part, despite their reduced pixel count.

Switch the P65VT20 to 2D mode (it doesn't carry any 2D-to-3D conversion circuitry), and it continues to impress. **HD pictures look consistently outstanding, with the massive screen emphatically delivering on Panasonic's plasma black level advantage**, while also producing superbly natural, subtle colours. High-definition images look terrifically crisp and detailed, too.

Game for anything

The P65VT20 doesn't just excel on films and TV either. Its rendition of the relentlessly dark *Alan Wake* on Xbox 360 frequently took my breath away, for instance, on account of its outstanding black level response.

Shifting my seating position around reminded us, too, of just how convenient plasma TVs are, since they don't suffer from reduced picture quality with wide viewing angles.

In theory, if the P65VT20 was going to have a major weakness, it would be with standard-definition sources. But in practice they're really not at all bad. The upscaling engine suppresses source noise without leaving the image looking overly soft, and unlike many LCD TVs and previous Panasonic plasmas, the P65VT20's colour palette doesn't go awry when shifting down from hi- to standard-def.

That said, this is clearly a TV that's tailored to showcase high-definition, so I'd strongly recommend that you keep it on a Full HD diet as much as humanly possible.

Really my only issue with the P65VT20's pictures, beyond the occasional (but good vs LCD) 3D crosstalk issues, is the very rare appearance of gentle fizzing noise over skin tones during horizontal camera pans.

Sonically pumped

A final surprising strength of the P65VT20 is its audio. The set carries three speakers in a 2.1 configuration, delivering 10W to each, and this helps it produce a soundstage that's wide, dynamic and powerful enough to accompany the king-sized screen.

The TV is overall another superb set from Panasonic. Its contrast, sharpness and sheer size make watching it a wonderfully cinematic experience, and while there's room for improvement, it also serves up the best 3D pictures currently available

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: This result was with Power Save turned off. Results were 440W with it turned on



Test footage: Little change with test footage and volume maxed. This is a power-hungry screen

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Far short of the claimed figure, but more than sufficient for 'real-world' viewing. Oddly, contrast ratio in 'dynamic' mode is less at 44,600:1

Colour accuracy



Presets: ISFccc manual adjustments are available; the most accurate preset is Warm
Cool: 10,500K
Normal: 7,500K
Warm: 5,900K
THX: 5,700K



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P65VT20
£4,800 Approx

Highs: Huge screen; excellent picture quality generally; powerful sound.
Lows: Not very slick design; slight crosstalk noise with 3D; will ramp up your electricity bill

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**



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HOME CINEMA Choice
Reference Status

Cinema's band of brothers

Adam Rayner is in heaven when he samples the reference-quality audio of this tower group



Built for purpose: Don't think of auditioning this system unless your viewing room is a decent size

AV/CV

Product: High-end speaker system

Positioning: Statement excellence range, designed from the ground up and definitely top end

Peers: Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 AV; B&W 800 Series

My mate Big Mick is the front-of-house engineer for *Metallica* and has the record for the largest sound system ever assembled. It was 1,200,000W and was for 1,500,000 people at the Monsters of Rock festival in Russia, which took place after the Iron Curtain came down. After all, speaker systems have to suit the amount of people assembled, or the space they are expected to cover; the THX Select and Ultra specifications, for instance, are all about the cubic capacity or volume of the room the systems are designed to fill.

And when it comes to cinema, the same rule applies to the space in any given room. Whether a living room in suburbia or a huge country barn extension, the size of the speakers you need will vary accordingly.

Now, I have a nice home and a lovely room that helped sell the house to me in the first place, as the fireplace has been removed and we can have a classic 5.1 system setup around where we like to sit. A Swiss chalet would go down well, especially in our lovely long garden, but I don't have that kind of cash. So, if a set of speakers is suitable for a magnificent home, I tend to gravitate towards them.

These are right on the edge of that criterion. Not because they are especially huge (they are about the size of the B&W 800 series, and the Monitor Audio Platinum Series front tower does get bigger than the one I had to play with), but because they are so lavishly and beautifully packaged. Often it's advisable to keep cartons in the loft for future use, especially in the event of a house move, but these MDF ended, band-strapped, Velcro-sealed >

wonders were as heavy empty as some cartons are when full!

Once I had got over the heebie jeebies and worked out that I had to ask nicely for the boxes to be kept at *HCC* Towers, I unpacked some of the most weightily attractive speakers I have ever seen. These speakers make a real statement, having been designed from the ground up, I was told, to be as fabulous as Monitor Audio can make them, both from the engineering and sonic points of view.

Animal magnetism

The design is first-rate: they have really strong gripping embedded Neodymium magnets to hold the snazzy, bent metal mesh grilles on their top-grain leather hide faces; Monitor Audio's signature branded front edges are present on the lavish cast chassis of the speaker drivers themselves; there are sexy metal trim bits on the top leading edges of the enclosures with the name engraved upon it; and the terminals are paired sets of lavishly made binding posts, complete with well engineered jumper pieces.

The latter even have a foam-lined home (in case you are going to bi-wire/bi-amp) in a box you get with the speakers. This also packs a spirit level and Allen-headed screwdrivers to assemble stands and feet.

The towers' feet themselves are delicious assemblages of precision engineering and can be used with the stubby, ovoid shiny-plated, multi-piece spikes, or else with those unscrewed and the rubbery polymer ring-grippers applied instead. These can optionally be used in a heavier-duty version under the awesomely pretty subwoofer.

The PLW15 sub has a huge kilowatt beast of an amplifier inside, and that mighty 15in cone is a ceramic metal alloy material (C-CAM) and sits under a big grille with turned metal stand-off legs. The cones in the rest of the speakers are made of a skinny layer of this ceramic alloy on a Nomex honeycomb, which makes them unfeasibly light yet rigid. The final cherry on the cake is the tweeter. A 'ribbon' type, it is a tiny sliver of C-CAM material, which acts as both voice coil and diaphragm, and as it weighs so little it can accelerate like a brute and can reach up to 100kHz. (And to think that at 20kHz it means 10,000 gravities of acceleration!)

But the overall finish is so lustrous and rich it made me feel guilty, as I'm not aware of any 'sustainable' Ebony plantations. If I am right, this speaker is covered in a veneer so rare and delicious, its use is obscenely unfriendly to the environment. **It is quite the most luscious and beautiful speaker finish I have ever seen**, and an awful lot of Monitor Audio fans will take one look and just hurt for wanting them.

But this 5.1 system offers far more than looks: the smarts are intense and that woofer is as clever as a weasel, yet without needing a room-EQ programme, microphone or boffin to set up. I silenced the eco-conscience with the thought that, after all, this ain't no mass market product, and slid the J J Abram's *Star Trek* into my Sony Blu-ray spinner.

Trek-tastic

In this brilliant sci-fi, the almost religious zeal with which actors and movie makers have paid homage to all that has gone before allows multiple references for Trekkers throughout, and I love it. I cranked it up to full reference level, while offering up silent praise to neighbours who just don't seem to mind, and as the soundtrack swelled and soared, I marvelled at the sheer scale, power and purity of the output.

It was great with the tiny details and yet had massive grip even at the zero dB level. In fact, I found it almost too loud – and for me that is quite a statement! The bass had a real, visceral thump-in-the-belly feel to it, which is quite a feat in my thru-lounge, as there is a void under the floorboards, a set of flexible (in acoustic terms) French windows and big, absorbant velvet curtains over them. That woofer, quite simply, is an animal.

Beyond the low-end, the Platinum array continues to impress. In an early scene reminiscent of the *Alien* movies, baddie Captain Nero is seen in his spaceship, which is wet and corroded inside. Despite the snarling and stuff going on, the dripping of water in the background was clear and crisp.

Even in the midst of explosions and mayhem, dialogue is unstrained and realistic, proving that the system can hit hard in the midband, too. Meanwhile, brass instruments in the soundtrack are great indicators of the high HF fidelity, because if you can hear the rasp of the timbre of the horns, you know you have your hands on some excellence.





The Platinum series features immaculate build quality

And these horns honked like wailing geese, with great detail, all through the sequence where James T. Kirk's dad snuffs it, while heroically saving his wife in childbirth, along with his ship's crew.

One lump or two?

And right there, barely a few minutes in, they bloody had me. I am as tough as marshmallow and wept buckets over *ET* and *Shallow Hal* alike (albeit for different reasons), but as long as the system is suitably involving, it doesn't take more than regular Hollywood guile to put a great big lump in my throat. As Jim's dad greets his son by video phone in the last few seconds of life, the violins swell with such purity I was reaching for the tissues – a broken man.

A later scene provides a great test of a speaker system's imaging ability. When we see a young Spock at school, young Vulcans learn in groups of individual, dish-shaped classrooms, and we track across the collective, listening to the multifarious tutors teaching seven-year-olds degree-level science. You can focus in on any one teacher, follow the voice as it goes through the soundstage, often diagonally as the camera tracks and **the vocals remain clear and easy to tell apart**. It's almost like one of those audio test tracks and it showed just how smart this system is.

Finally, a word on the HF drivers. In the past, I heard a tweeter called the EMIT (Electro Magnetic Induction Tweeter), made by Infinity, and while it looks the same as this C-CAM job, it is more delicate and tinkly and ethereal. I was half hoping that these tweeters might offer the same breathy loveliness, but they don't. What they do is handle some real power, which shouldn't be possible. So while they add fabulous detail and edge, as well as incredible staging and placement to the system, they still allow truly offensive levels to be raised.

I love them to bits and found that they also have a terrific linear response, which means they work just as sweetly at low levels and with music.

So, in case you hadn't realised, I reckon we have another reference grade set on our hands here. A 5.1 system of true class. And, if you really want to fill a big room, Monitor Audio also makes an even bigger set of towers that promise to knock your socks off!

→ Specifications

MA Platinum PL200 towers

Drive Units: 2 x 6.5in RDT C-CAM midbass drivers with honeycomb Nomex cones; 1 x 4in midrange RDT driver in TLE internal enclosure and 1 x C-CAM ribbon tweeter
Enclosure: Rear-ported HiVell (High Velocity reflex port) technology, 3-way
Frequency Response: 35Hz-100kHz
Sensitivity: 90dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 250W
Dimensions: 360 (w) x 998 (h) x 375 (d)mm
Weight: 33Kg

Platinum PLC150 Centre

Drive Units: 2 x 6.5in RDT C-CAM midbass drivers with honeycomb Nomex cones plus 1 x C-CAM ribbon tweeter
Enclosure: 2-way rear-ported
Frequency Response: 45Hz-100kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 583(w) x 225(h) x 292(d)mm
Weight: 19Kg

Platinum PL100 rears

Drive Units: 1 x 6.5in RDT C-CAM midbass driver with honeycomb Nomex cone plus 1 C-CAM ribbon tweeter
Enclosure: Rear-ported, 2-way
Frequency Response: 42Hz-100kHz
Sensitivity: 88dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 120W
Dimensions: 225(w) x 370(h) x 285(d)mm
Weight: 13Kg

Platinum PLW15 subwoofer

Drive Unit: 1 x 15in long-throw C-CAM cone woofer with 4in voice coil
Enclosure: 25mm sealed MDF
Frequency Response: 16Hz-40Hz/160Hz (variable)
On board power: 1,000W RMS Class D
Dimensions: 485(w) x 455(h) x 475(d)mm
Weight: 50Kg



HCC VERDICT

Monitor Audio Platinum Series PL200AV
£11,500 Approx

Highs: Grand scale; might and purity with great sense of space; gorgeous looks
Lows: Challenging assembly job

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**



HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★★ BEST BUY

Genie of the amp

Pioneer has succeeded in adding extra magic to the latest receiver from its award-winning series. And **Richard Stevenson** is rocking his socks off

Back in 2008, Pioneer launched the SC-LX81 and we liked it. We liked it so much, in fact, it won awards and everything. It used ICEpower Class D amplification developed by B&O and it was the best-sounding implementation of the technology we had heard. It scooped all the Oscars for style and was festooned with must-have widgets, too. A year later came the equally good and stylish SC-LX82, but by this time the peer group had caught up in sound quality and surpassed it on sheer features. 'Righty-ho', said Pioneer's engineer's (albeit in Japanese), 'prepare to be blown away by 2010's SC-LX83.'

Out with the black

At just shy of £2K, the SC-LX83 is not cheap, but you know you have bought something special. It is a huge, superbly appointed box, and is still the most alluring AV beast on the market, even if its once piano black fascia is now a more conservative brushed satin. The core power amplifiers remain unchanged, being the same Direct Energy HD ICEpower devices as its forebear. This is no bad thing, as Pioneer's implementation of them not only sounds great, but also claims to use a frugal amount of electricity – about a third of traditional Class A/B amps, in fact.

Thrilled to bits: The PQLS anti-jitter system now works on bitstream signals that help smooth out noise

The brand's PQLS anti-jitter system has been further advanced and now works on bitstream signals,



Brush with glamour: Pioneer's LX range of AV components now feature a 'brushed satin' finish instead of the gloss black look of 2009

→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES and Pro-Logic IIz
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES and DTS ES 6.1 Discrete
THX: YES THX Ultra2 Plus
Multichannel audio (claimed): 7 x 190W
Multichannel input: YES, 7.1 phono
Multi-room: YES main + 2 zones
AV inputs: YES 7 x S-video & phono audio, 5 x digital audio (2 x coaxial, 3 x optical)
HDMI: YES 6-in 2-out (one front loader)
Video upsclaing: YES to 1080p
Component video: YES 3-in, 2-out
Dimensions: 420(w) x 460 (d) x 200(h) mm
Weight: 18.5kg
Features: AIR Studios tuning; 9.1-channel pre-outs; FM/AM tuner; Advanced MCACC RoomEQ; auto-setup with supplied mic; iPod dock via USB (supplied cable) with video; networking via wired Ethernet, IP and Bluetooth; WMA, MP3, FLAC and WAV file playback from USB; RF learning remote; DLNA certified; full band phase control; ICEpower amplifiers; bitstream PQLS audio link over HDMI; iPhone App control; 2 x IR 'magic-eye' IR repeaters

as well as LPCM multichannel and plain old, standard stereo PCM. With a compatible PQLS Pioneer Blu-ray disc-spinner, digital jitter over the HDMI interface is all but eliminated, resulting in a cleaner and more accurate audio transfer from player to amp. Add to this a new suite of 32-bit DACs prior to amplification and **the LX83 has all the potential to be a sonic diva with high-resolution material**. Even if you are listening to compressed formats such as MP3, WMA, A2DP transfer Bluetooth audio or even old school, DVD-based Dolby Digital or DTS (ah, how *passé*...), Pioneer's latest Sound Retriever Air system is on hand to rekindle some depth and vibrancy to the sound.

And it comes as no surprise that this baby offers the full gamut of HD-audio decoding, 3D-compatible V1.4a HDMI connections and upscaling of any video to 1080p.

Interestingly, it remains a stoically seven-channel amplifier, even though it features Dolby ProLogic IIz decoding for front height channels. Instead, the rear-back output can now be assigned to front height duty, and there is a 9.1 channel line-level output suite should you fancy going for the full complement of rear-back and height channels. Like its forbears, this is a top-spec THX Ultra2 Plus certified machine, complete with all the associated post-processing suites, and is fine tuned by Air Studios. But this receiver really excels on its controls and connections.

AV/CV

Product: Networked all-digital AV receiver

Positioning: A cut-down version of the Susano flagship with more features!

Peers: Denon AVR-4310; Onkyo TX-NR5007

App control

Yeah, everyone does Ethernet and USB networking, but the LX83 adds a fully A2DP-compliant Bluetooth dongle for wireless music streaming and control. Pioneer's genuinely revolutionary iPhone/iPod/iPad iControlAV App (as per VSX-920 reviewed last issue) will also operate the bulk of this receiver's day-to-day functions. Moreover, it does so with a grace and animated style that makes traditional remote controls look like objects for the *Antiques Roadshow*.

The iControl AV software is inspired and allows your i-whatever to speak to the LX83 either directly over the Bluetooth dongle, or via your Wi-Fi router and hardwired Ethernet to the amplifier. Either way, it works seamlessly, offering genuine two-way communication, has informative videos and is simply the coolest thing in AV since *Ice Age 3*.

And that isn't all. The supplied standard remote control is not only well equipped with a backlit reversed LCD display, it is also an RF device. As radio frequency goes through walls to some extent, the amplifier can be hidden away in a cupboard or even a different room and still accept inputs from the remote. Moreover, as well as being programmable to control the brand's and other makers' kit via IR, the manufacturer has then thoughtfully supplied two IR magic eyes for any other kit you might want to hide away. Top marks!

And, if you've still not had enough control magic, take note that the SC-LX83 offers full RS232



Plug and play: The SC-LX83's connectivity is excellent, with multiple digital and analogue options

integration, plus IP control and a web browser interface as well. Not only does this ensure that it can be integrated with any IP-based custom install system, it also allows you to spy on it and see what it is up to while you are at work. I suppose I am a little surprised that the LX83 doesn't have built-in wi-fi, but for serious networking (including critical firmware updates) you really do need a hardwire connection anyway.

More equal than others

Running the Pioneer's incredible MCACC setup and Room EQ software is a walk in the park and the beast is quickly ready to party. MCACC not only does all the usual parametric EQ balancing, but it also offers full band phase, reverb and standing wave control. Just add a PC to download the graphs and perhaps a degree in systems engineering to fathom it all out, and you have a very comprehensive EQ system at home. Thankfully, the full-auto mode works a treat and takes the sweat out of it.

Given that the beating heart of the SC-LX83 is almost a facsimile of its predecessor, it is no surprise that the sound is just as clean and fast. **Bass effects have a crispness and dynamic attack that takes your breath away and the top end simply soars without getting harsh or acerbic**. The midrange is buffed so clean and smooth it almost sounds a little laid back, but in reality this simply translates into an incredibly natural sounding dialogue.

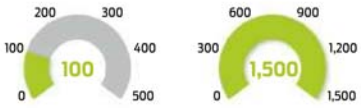
The overall sound is hugely open and spacious, and effects from big explosions to ambient information are starkly detailed. The peculiar sound of the alien weapons firing in *District 9* is fuelled with crackling electrical power, and the ensuing explosion of human targets is rendered suitably wet and squidgy. The pod ship taking off under its own thrust is a cornucopia of audio effects – engine roar, the building collapsing, the wave of sand heading toward by-standers – and the Pioneer doesn't flinch at painting an incredibly detailed and defined picture. Switching between full MCACC with phase control on and then all off reveals just how much mid-bass room bloom alone that the system eliminates. Switch the EQ back on and the soundstage simply swells in every direction, allowing each facet of the audio better definition and space.

The Blu-ray of *AC/DC: Live at Donnington* reminds me just what I found wanting on the old LX82: a bit of passion. However, it only does this because I think the new 32bit DACs have given back some much needed *verve*. Given a handful of volume, the LX83 allows Brian Johnson to power into the room while keeping a tight reign on Chris Slade's enthusiastic use of the hi-hat back in 1992. As the disc progresses, the Pioneer really gets into the rock concert groove. While it's never going to throw the TV out of the window or drive a Rolls Royce into your pool, it does now wear denim jeans and a leather jacket when required.

The SC-LX83 builds on the strength of the predecessors in its winning stable, but it's packed with wow-factor features and sounds even more potent and exciting than its forbears. Detail, power, passion, cool iPhone widgetry and sumptuous style. What's not to love?

→ Tech Labs

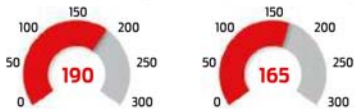
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: The SC-LX83 is power-hungry even when it's just ticking over

Powered: Running all seven channels, this AVR needs 1,500W

Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



2-channel 8Ω: A power house in two-channel mode. – our Tech Labs measured 190W into 8Ω.

5-channel 8Ω: There's little drop off in five-channel mode, either. And with seven channels driven, the SC-LX83 still delivers 135W per channel

Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall: A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.5% THD, 8Ω, 1kHz), the Pioneer outclasses many of its rivals and matches Krell's power amp

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: These figures show noise unlikely to be a problem during a film's quieter moments



HCC VERDICT

Pioneer SC-LX83
£2,000 Approx

Highs: Punchy, detailed sound with awesome control; packed with features

Lows: Seven channel amp only; we preferred the gloss black...

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Press blu to record

For DIY recording in HD, you can't beat a Blu-ray recorder. **Adrian Justins** tells archiving enthusiasts to put this dual-tuner model high on their wish lists



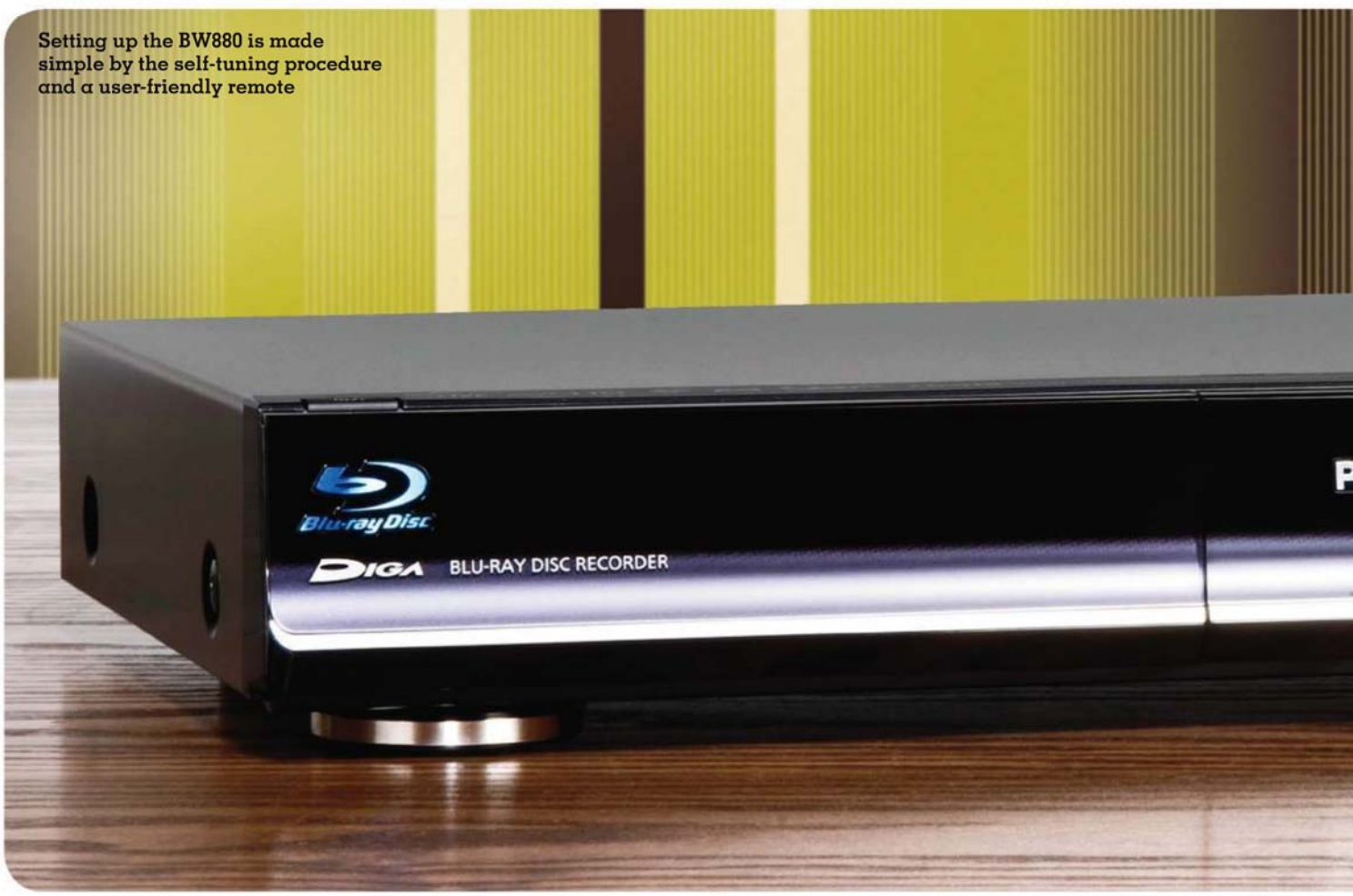
Steve Jobs may have dismissed Blu-ray, but when it comes to watching and archiving HD movies, IP delivery and hard-disk storage have some way to go before they can match the convenience and efficiency of optical media. And for the significant, but niche, group of enthusiasts who like to archive either TV broadcasts or their own digital home video recordings, a Blu-ray/PVR combi is the ultimate living room recorder, especially when it has dual Freeview HD tuners.

A couple of years ago, Panasonic bestowed a brace of Blu-ray recorders on the world with its Freesat models, so it was no surprise when the 500GB DMR-BW880 and 320GB DMR-BW780 recently rode in to town on the coat tails of Freeview HD. When Freesat launched it was hampered by copy restrictions that prevented ITV HD shows from being archived. Happily, this situation is not an encumbrance to Freeview, as present rules allow BBC HD broadcasts to be copied on to Blu-ray multiple times, while those from ITV and C4 may be copied once (and you can make further limitless standard-definition copies).

Austere exterior: Its design may be dull and old-fashioned, but inside the technology is state of the art

Considering how cutting-edge the DMR-BW880 is under the hood the box itself looks somewhat bland. The fascia is split into two drop-down panels; one hides the optical disc drive, the other, through which the LED display shines, reveals some basic transport control buttons, composite video/stereo phonos and inputs for DV, SD card and USB. With Top Up TV now offering Sky Sports, the absence of a CI slot could prove critical for sports fans.

The front edge of the otherwise nondescript top is festooned with 14 barely visible badges such as AVCHD,



Setting up the BW880 is made simple by the self-tuning procedure and a user-friendly remote

GuidePlus+ and DTS-HD MA, with the Freeview+ HD, DVB and Gracenote logos getting full prominence on the front right panel. The latter has significance for anyone likely to use the BW880 as a music server; the hard disk can store 40,000 tracks and has a folder structure similar to an MP3 player with artist, album, playlist, favourite and random options.

Despite charging a princely sum for the BW880, Panasonic doesn't provide any built-in flash memory, and to enjoy BD-Live you need to supply your own 1GB SD card. The company did at least find room for both optical and coaxial digital audio outputs. All common video formats can be output, with the exception of component video.

Up and running

It takes some time to get to grips with the BW880. If, like me, you take the plug 'n' play approach before reading the 120-page instruction manual, you'll be pleased to know that the machine tunes itself in and asks you to set basic preferences such as power saving settings. Within minutes, I was watching BBC 1 and instinctively pressed the okay button on the remote to access the channel list. No programme info is provided here but scrolling up and down and selecting a channel is reassuringly fast.

AV/CV

Product: Freeview+ HD PVR with built-in Blu-ray recorder

Positioning: Flagship model in a six-strong range of Freeview/optical disc recorders

Peers: Nothing comparable on the market except Panasonic's DMR-BW780

Considering Panasonic's deck is such a complex beast, both the menu system and remote control are well laid out, and the latter deserves special praise. It's a nice size, has good ergonomics and colour coding, not to mention the fact that all the vital functions are easily and logically accessed. One key button allows you to switch between the HDD, BD, USB and SD drives.

For the most part **Panasonic's user interface works very well, but, like the box itself, it looks dated** and not nearly as slick as those used by the likes of LG and Samsung. Even more offensive, though, is the GuidePlus+ sponsored Freeview EPG, which carries poster adverts that even Gene Hunt would find archaic. Advertising has its place, but the EPG page isn't one of them. Another annoyance about the EPG is that you entirely loose the picture and sound of the current broadcast.

The EPG shows seven channels in two-hour segments and you can switch between list and grid view. You can filter by genre, but not according to definition type (HD or SD), and you can directly view the channel or set a recording timer, including series link. The EPG does tell you if a show in standard-definition is also available in HD, and you can pad out recordings manually or change the title.

Banner info when watching a live TV broadcast shows Now and Next descriptions, whether it's HD or not, as well as what the audio format is and what else is being recorded at that time. All TV shows are recorded in DR (direct record) mode using the same bitrate (8Mbps for HD, 4Mbps for SD) as the original, to the hard disk. The 500GB HDD has a handy 130-hour HD capacity.

Performance

The HD Freeview tuner is first rate. The BBC Make Up Department should take note: the orange line across Gary Lineker's forehead has never seemed so obvious! Image clarity and detail are a match for Sky HD and any other Freeview HD tuners. >



→ Specifications

Blu-ray recorder: *YES* BD-R, BD-RE
DVD recorder: *YES* DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW and DVD-RAM
Dual-layer recording: *YES*
HDD: *YES* 500GB (130hr of HD)
Tuner: *YES* dual-tuner Freeview HD
Upscaling: *YES* to 1080p
Recording modes: *11* DR, HG, HX, HE, HL, HM, XP, SP, LP, EP, FR
HDMI: *YES* 1
Component output: *NO*
Phono audio output: *YES* 1
Digital audio output: *YES* Coaxial and optical
Dimensions: 430(w) x 66(h) x 238(d)mm
Weight: 3.1kg
Features: EPG; Series Link; DLNA server (Windows 7 only); Ethernet; VieraCast; manual recording; editing (divide); file conversion; JPEG, MP3, MPEG2, WMV, DivX HD and AVCHD compatible; DV input; USB; SD card; dual Scart; Optical and coaxial audio output PCM, Dolby Digital, DTS, MPEG; HDMI audio output PCM, Dolby Digital, DTS, MPEG, Dolby Digital Plus, Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio, DTS-HD High Resolution Audio.

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★ BEST BUY



Scart attack: The BW880 has two Scart sockets, but we can't think why you'd want to use them

Standard-def pictures are also excellent, especially if you set the output to 1080p and partner the box with a decent screen. One caveat is that detail drops-off just a tiny bit with recordings, presumably as a result of re-encoding. On all but the largest of screens it will be barely noticeable, but certainly on a Samsung UE46C8000 I noticed skin tones appeared blotchier. Fortunately, no more detail is lost when recordings are copied on to Blu-ray.

Sonic shortage

Audio clarity is also very good, but the BW880 doesn't output Dolby Digital surround sound. This is because broadcasters use the AAC codec, in order to ensure provision of Audio Description, and the box can't transcode from AAC to DD (few units can, in fact). When spinning Blu-rays, though, the likes of Dolby Digital Plus, Dolby TrueHD, and DTS-HD MA can all be bitstreamed via the HDMI output.

The Direct Navigator button on the remote is the gateway to recordings, which are displayed with a thumbnail. You can view shows by genre, as well as those not viewed and AVCHD files archived from your camcorder. In all modes unviewed shows are flagged up and icons tell you how many Blu-ray copies can be made of HD ITV and C4 programmes. To copy archived material to Blu-ray you might want to convert from DR to HG, a process which is done in real time, but can be done when the machine is in standby. While this lowers the bitrate by around 50 per cent, it's still considered HD. The reason to do this? Because nowhere in the manual or onscreen does it tell you that if you wish to play a finalised Blu-ray recording in another brand's player you have to convert from DR mode.

A number of useful editing options are available such as chapter marking, splitting, changing the thumbnail and renaming. Blank disc formatting can't be done if the hard disk is recording a show, but after that it's fairly straightforward to select titles for copying, as the Panny walks you through the process of selecting the copy mode and direction and which shows you want.

Despite some rather sluggish disc-loading times, the DMR-BW880 is a very decent Blu-ray deck. The incredible *Avatar* disc looks clean and pure, as the deck renders plenty of fine detail in Sully's T-shirt and in the bristle of his beard. Multimedia playback is not as broad as some machines and it oddly refused to show my reference JPEG snaps, but MP3 and DivX HD played back without any problem.

Clearly, the DMR-BW880 won't be everyone's cup of tea, and it bears a price tag commensurate with its early adopter status. But if Blu-ray archive recording from Freeview HD is your bag, this is a highly accomplished machine that comfortably delivers the goods – plus a few others besides●



Graphic imagery: Panasonic has finally added a little pizzazz to its GUIs

→Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

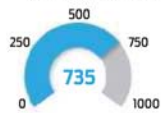


Idling: This is lower than the BS880 (the BW880's Freesat equivalent) because there are no LNBs to worry about



Powered: The BW880 uses 20W when playing a disc

Audio Jitter: Ps



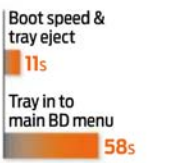
Sound: By Panasonic's usually high standards, this analogue audio jitter measurement is poor

Video Jitter: Ns



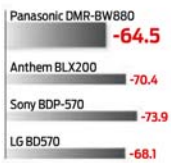
Vision: Similarly, this video jitter figure is average, nothing more

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Not as fast as some dedicated decks, but still nifty. Note that when 'power save in standby' is activated, bootup takes 31seconds

Video S/N: dB



Ratio: Not as impressive as many of its Blu-ray player rivals



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMR-BW880
£800 Approx

Highs: User friendly; versatile; quality BD-R recordings; remote control
Lows: Dated looking GUI; adverts within EPG; no CI slot

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Until the merger is complete, which will take a few months, **Sevenoaks Sound & Vision** and **Audio T** will remain separate legal entities.

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PANASONIC

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42 46 50

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VIERA V20

46 50



G20

freesat HD Freeview HD NEOPDP



PHILIPS

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Freeview

NEW



PANASONIC

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Say goodbye to the red and green glasses and the blurry 3D images of the past. Panasonic's new NeoPDP Plasma TVs with full HD 3D use Frame Sequential technology which sends a Full HD image to each eye individually. You just need a pair of active-shutter 3D Eyewear and to sit back and step into the action.

HOME CINEMA BEST BUY

PROJECTORS

EPSON

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Designed to bring outstanding quality to a budget conscious home cinema enthusiast. The projector features full HD (1920 x 1080) resolution and a 200000:1 contrast ratio.





OPTOMA

HD20 | HD82

These new full HD DLP projectors from Optoma combine great performance with outstanding value for money.

BLU-RAY DISC PLAYERS



PANASONIC

This new range includes the Full HD 3D capable DMP-BDT300 along with three conventional 2D players. All players blend comprehensive features, super-fast booting with superior sound and stunning HD-quality images.

DMP-BDT300 | DMP-BD65 | DMP-BD85

PIONEER

Get the most out of your movies with Pioneer's luxuriously designed BDP-330 and top-of-the-range BDP-LX53. Both models feature network functionality including YouTube browsing and RSS feeds.



BDP-330 | BDP-LX53

DENON

Denon's new range of 3D ready, universal disc players, deliver high-end picture and sound quality.



DBP-1611UD | DBP-2011UD

SONY

Experience movies like never before. These new Blu-ray disc players let you watch your favourite movie moments in true full high definition with superior high resolution surround sound. Models include the 2D BDP-S370 and 3D ready BDP-S470 and BDP-S570.



BDP-S370 | BDP-S570

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audio T

HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIERS & RECEIVERS

DENON

Denon's 2010 range of A/V receivers continues to impress. The latest addition to the range is the 7-channel AVR-1911 which features full 3D connectivity and 3D surround sound options, along with HDMI v1.4a. Other models coming soon are the AVR-2311, AVR-3311 and AVR-4311.

AVR-1911	AVR-3311
AVR-2311	AVR-4311





ONKYO

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TX-SR608	TX-NR808
TX-NR708	TX-NR1008

PIONEER

Experience film and music just as the creators intended with Pioneer's range of A/V receivers.

VSX-920	SC-LX73
VSX-2020	SC-LX83



YAMAHA

Yamaha A/V amplifiers and receivers are packed with features, offer excellent sound and represent outstanding value.

DSP-Z7	RX-V667
RX-V567	RX-V767

The range includes the new 3D-ready RX-V567 (below) and the YSP-4100/5100 soundbars.



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MONITOR AUDIO

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BRONZE BX
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RADIUS

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B&W

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YAMAHA

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KEF

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KHT2005.3 | KHT3005SE

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Dream streamer

An elegant, easy to use Blu-ray player that will ease your migration to networked home entertainment, says plugged-in **Steve May**

The first wave of 3D-capable Blu-ray decks may have been hogging the limelight of late, but for those not yet sold on the ability to play barely a handful of 3D discs, the appeal of a feature-packed 2D model for significantly less coin remains significant.

What makes the BD570 of particular interest is its network streaming abilities, and we've been advocating this type of entertainment for some time here at *HCC*. If you are accumulating a growing collection of sound and vision files on your PC or, more likely, a NAS (Network Attached Storage) device, then you'll be looking for an adept media player to bring them into your main AV environment. One way is via a dedicated streamer, another is with a Blu-ray player such as this that does much the same job.

LG has been pioneering network-centric disc spinners for some time and this is its most ambitious player yet. As a BD player it's tidy and at just 204mm deep, it's half the size of its 2008 counterpart. The front fascia is distinguished only by the USB 2.0 slot, into which you can attach USB devices with media for immediate playback. The back panel sports Ethernet, HDMI v1.2, coaxial and optical digital outputs, component video and phono AV outputs.

Perhaps surprisingly, there's no internal memory for BD Live. You have to add your own in the form of a USB Flash drive. Unfortunately, there's only one slot and that's on the front, which looks rather unsightly. Quite why LG didn't think to add a second USB to the rear for BD Live support is a headscratcher.

Network savvy

The BD570 is fully DLNA-certified and can stream media from other DLNA/UPnP devices on your home network, either via its Ethernet connection or over wi-fi.

AV/CV

Product: DLNA-compliant media streaming Blu-ray player

Positioning: Sits below LG's first 3D BD player in the brand's stable

Peers: Panasonic DMP-BD65; Sony BDP-S470

File support is good, but not class leading. It can play AVI, DivX, MPEG, MKV and AVCHD video footage, along with MP3, WAV and WMA music. There are other exceptions when it comes to compatibility (there is no support for FLAC audio), but these are covered in the owner's manual. **If your media collection includes some of the more exotic file types, then a dedicated media streamer may be more appropriate**, however, most common usage is covered. Interestingly, the BD570 will also recognise .srt subtitle files, but only if the folder they reside in is accessed via USB. Rather annoyingly, it cannot find them over the network.

Increasingly, it's the user interfaces rather than the best-in-class components that define a great home entertainment product. And here the LG consistently scores. To denote its coolness, the deck's user



interface allows navigation through bobbing ice cube graphics. The Movie, Photo, Music tabs allow you to search for media; Home Link scours your network for UPnP and DLNA devices, while NetCast takes you to LG's internet portal, which offers access to YouTube, picture browsing via Picasa or weather-checking through AccuWeather.

One aspect that rocks is its integration with the Gracenote media database. Play an audio CD and the deck pulls in album art from here and displays it onscreen, which is very cool. The spinner will also scrape Gracenote when you play a music file from an attached USB device, although it doesn't use the same picture window as CD playback does for the art. Access music from a NAS, though, and it makes no attempt to find cover art, which is a real shame.

Another great feature is Music ID. During a movie you can hit the Music ID button on the remote and the player will extract soundtrack information from the Gracenote database. This is a party trick that never fails to amaze. Meanwhile, high-resolution megapixel digital images are resolved in HD, which will please digital snappers.

Shipped with the player is Nero Media Home 4 Essentials, a DLNA compliant media server software package. This is an extremely powerful suite that ensures all content can be seen across your network. Not only does it ease access for the LG player, but it also ensures visibility to Xbox 360, PS3 and other devices. It can also transcode file formats on the fly.

Convergence king: LG's new deck is both a media streamer and BD spinner

Spin the disc

Image clarity over HDMI is terrific. *The Book of Eli*, with its high-contrast cinematography, looks ravishing on this LG, with every detail on Denzel Washington's post apocalyptic stubble available for inspection. The deck boots and ejects in just four seconds, and our Tech Labs BD test disc was on screen within 50secs, which we rate as good performance.

SD DVD playback is fine too, although there is a fairly high level of noise in the picture. Deinterlacing is very good, too, resulting in smooth upscaled 1080p images.

As you may grasped, this is not an audiophile grade player and, with high analogue audio jitter at just under 1200ps, we'd recommend using the optical link for CD playback.

Blu-ray audio support includes Dolby Digital Plus, Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA. To bitstream out you need to set the audio option to Primary Pass Thru.

Overall, the LG570 is a thoroughly engaging Blu-ray and network player that should negate the need to buy a separate media streamer for most users (so long as you don't need FLAC support). While there's still room for improvement, I rate this deck as a terrific playback and entertainment solution

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: This is a good result, according to given standards



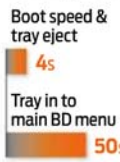
Playing: A good figure that warms the cockles of our hearts

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: Pretty mediocre, but then again the BD570 is not targeted at hi-fi freaks

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Boot speed is pretty nifty and tray-in speed is acceptable

→ Specifications

3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* up to 1080p over HDMI
Multiregion: *YES* Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 1 v1.3
Component: *YES* 1 set
Multichannel analogue: *NO* (stereo phono outputs only)
Digital audio: *YES* Optical and coaxial electrical
SACD/DVD-A: *NO*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: *YES*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES*
Dimensions: 430(w) x 44(h) x 204(d)mm
Weight: 2kg
Features: Integrated 802.11n wi-fi; DLNA support with media streaming (JPEG, AVI, DiVX, MPG, MPEG, MKV, WMA, MP3, WAV); LG NetCast content portal with YouTube, Picasa and AccuWeather, front-facing USB; Gracenote Media Database scraping for CDs and local files, Music ID service for BD/DVD/files, variable sampling frequency output



HCC VERDICT

LG BD570
£200 Approx

Highs: Media streaming and networking; Gracenote integration; disc loading speed; integrated wi-fi
Lows: No internal memory for BD Live; some inconsistencies in the user interface and operation

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Over the rainbow

Vivitek fills the gap between its appealing budget and high-end projector ranges. **John Archer** rates this Full HD DLP model

AV/CV

Product: Single-chip Full HD DLP projector

Positioning: The H5080 sits a good few notches above Vivitek's entry level H1085

Peers: JVC DLA-HD550; Panasonic PT-AE4000

A single chipper that manages to make DLP tech's inherent rainbow effect a thing of the past



Taiwanese brand Vivitek has hit the ground running in its recent bid to conquer the UK projector market, having already impressed us with both a strong sub-£1,000 budget model and a spectacular £10K three-LED flagship variant, labelled the H9080FD.

So we're intrigued to be looking at a mid-range model, the H5080, which is well built and glossy enough to avoid any accusations of ugliness, thanks to the symmetrically mounted lens. But it is chunky.

Its connectivity is unexpectedly good, though, thanks chiefly to its provision of not two, but three HDMIs. The H5080 also handily provides two 12V trigger outputs, and both RS232 and USB ports to help the projector integrate properly into a wider home cinema installation. These latter connectors could help the H5080 become a favourite with custom installers seeking an inexpensive but flexible big-screen option. With this in mind, Vivitek also makes four different lens options for this lightbox, with one short and two long-throw options available, plus the standard mid-throw affair.

Other handy setup tricks include very responsive horizontal and vertical image shifting, with straightforward manual zoom and focus rings around the lens.

Vivacious colour

The H5080 continues to offer good picture flexibility in its onscreen menus. There's a decent colour management system, for instance, plus a series of sensibly calibrated picture presets, plenty of gamma setting options, an auto-contrast 'DynamicBlack' system delivering a claimed 25,000:1 contrast ratio, plus Vivitek's 'ViviSettings' in-house video processing system.

The latter includes motion compensation processing, sharpness fine-tuning, and a Flesh Tone setting that provides a quintet of 'base' skin colour options. Unfortunately, none of the settings actually benefit the H5080's pictures and, in many ways, actually make them worse. This is particularly true of the ViviMotion system, which consistently generates unwanted side effects.

Happily, with ViviSettings turned off, the H5080's pictures are really very good. Particularly pleasing, given that the H5080 uses single-chip DLP technology, is how little the projector suffers from the rainbow effect, even during particularly challenging sequences such as the opening credits of *Alien*, where bright lettering sits atop dark backgrounds.

Making this all the more impressive is the fact that the 'gap' between the peak whites of the titles and the deep blacks of space is extremely wide, thanks to the machine's startling ability to paint rich, black colours within the same frame as bright whites and colours.

The H5080 also produces a very intense colourscape, with vibrant, punchy saturations during bright and dark scenes alike. Critically, though, these well-saturated colours seldom, if ever, tip over into looking forced.

With HD material, the lightbox produces a likeably sharp, detailed picture. Certainly rival projectors at the H5080's level, such as Epson's TW4400 and JVC's DLA-HD550, can deliver a crisper, more forensic HD experience. But we suspect some tastes might prefer the H5080's slightly softer scrutiny.

The H5080 upscales SD material quite effectively, too, if you have to watch this from time to time!

Our complaints are few, but we must say it does run more loudly than we'd like, with Vivitek's 27dB claim feeling a tad conservative. And the pictures contain slightly more video noise than those of its best non-DLP rivals, too, with greenish grey dotting visible during dark scenes and an occasional slight fizzing to expanses of rich colour.

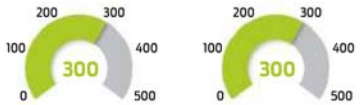
Finally, the H5080 doesn't run quite brightly enough after calibration to reproduce as much shadow detail as some rivals, though you might argue that its black level depth sufficiently compensates for this

→ Specifications

3D Ready: NO
HD Ready: YES 1080p/24
Component video: YES 1 input
HDMI: YES 3 inputs
PC input: YES 1 D-Sub
12V trigger: YES 2
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 Lumens
Contrast ratio (claimed): 25,000:1 dynamic
Dimensions: 430(w) x 181(h) x 343(d)mm
Weight: 8.60kg
Features: DLP technology; 2,000 hours lamp life in normal mode; 27dB running noise in Normal lamp mode; gamma adjustment; ViviSettings picture processing suite with motion, sharpness and colour adjustments; DynamicBlack mode; vertical and horizontal image shift; RS-232 and USB control ports; colour management system; picture presets

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: The Vivitek uses 300W in 'standard' lamp mode, and 350W in 'boost' lamp mode

Test footage: Power consumption stays the same, regardless of picture content

Contrast: ratio



Picture: We measured contrast at considerably higher than Vivitek claims. Luminance is 20.3fL

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: None of the presets are particularly close to 6,500K. There are comprehensive HSG adjustments, but these had little effect on the white point
Standard: 7,400K
Cool: 9,100K
Cooler: 10,100K
High Cool: 11,200
Lamp Native: 9,100K
Warm: 5,600K



HCC VERDICT

Vivitek H5080
£2,700 approx

Highs: Tidily designed; three HDMI inputs; excellent contrast and colour performance
Lows: Runs slightly loud; a little video noise during dark scenes

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

This model is a CCFL LCD and has none of the slimness afforded by LED backlighting

AV/CV

Product: A 47in LCD TV that takes a non-Full HD approach to 3D

Positioning: The only passive LCD 3D model in LG's entire range

Peers: LG 47LX9900 (active 3D), Samsung 46C750 (active 3D)



→ Specifications

Full HD: YES 1080p/24 Tuners: YES Freeview and analogue
Component video: YES 1 input (rear)
HDMI/DVI: YES 4 v1.4 HDMI inputs (one side)
PC input: YES 1 D-Sub Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080 Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: 500cd/m² Contrast ratio: 150,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1173(w) x 723(h) x 101(d)mm
Weight: 20.8kg
Features: 200Hz; DivX HD video playback; JPEG photo playback; MP3 playback; gamma adjustment; passive 3D output; degree of colour management; various 3D platforms supported; Picture Wizard; Energy Saving mode; multiple AV presets; noise/digital noise reduction; black level adjustment; left/right field switching for 3D



Passive resister

John Archer dons a pair of dirt-cheap spex to sample the passive, side-by-side 3D technology from LG's LCD stable



Many people just don't want to wear 3D glasses at all, and even those who don't mind them object to paying £100, or more, for active 3D glasses.

But LG's 47LD950 proposes a clever solution: you do still have to wear glasses to watch 3D, but these can be the ultra cheap ones given away at the cinema, thereby making group viewing sessions affordable. LG even gives you four plastic-rimmed 3D glasses for free with the TV.

The screen can do this because, unlike LG's flagship 55LX9900 we tested recently, it uses passive (offset) 3D technology rather than the active shutter/alternate frame 3D technology that's currently flavour of the month.

Inevitably, there's a trade-off to the convenience and cost-saving aspect of passive 3D technology. For, when you've got two images appearing simultaneously side-by-side, as happens with passive 3D technology, you lose image resolution compared with TVs that show Full HD left eye/right eye frames sequentially.

The 47LD950 is a standard CCFL LCD TV, and it's a sizeable beast that has a considerable chunk of glossy bezel extending out beyond its edges. But it's not unattractive.

Its connections initially look spot on. However, closer examination reveals no Ethernet port, which means no online functions and no DLNA PC support. Amazingly, there's no Freeview HD tuner, either.

The 47LD950's passive 3D approach is best summed up as 'interesting'. With Sky's 3D channel, which itself uses a side-by-side system, it's startlingly good. Pictures don't look any less detailed than on active 3D sets, and they feel more natural and less tiring, thanks to the absence of alternate frame's inherent 'flicker' and crosstalk ghosting noise.

In fact, since the 47LD950 also doesn't reduce the brightness and colour dynamism as much as active 3D technology, **I'd say it's my favourite LCD/LED-based Sky 3D performer yet**. Shame, then, that it all goes pear-shaped with Blu-ray 3D.

The set struggles to resolve both depth and motion convincingly with Full HD Active 3D sources. The effect is of an image divided in two, with either the foreground clearly in focus while the back focal plane looks unclear and disconnected, or vice versa.

You can choose whether to have foreground or background clarity by opting for the set's left/right or right/left 3D option. But, unfortunately, neither consistently satisfies, meaning 3D Blu-ray images are almost unwatchable and leave you feeling fatigued within minutes.

This is a real shame, as the set's rich colours, bright output and lack of flickering and crosstalk otherwise make for a reasonably compelling 3D Blu-ray proposition, despite a lack of resolution versus active 3D sets.

Consumer bypass

As a standard 2D set, the 47LD950 is good, with superior HD detailing, bold colours and pleasing motion handling. However, it's also a rather uninspiring standard-def upscaler, with average black levels and flat audio. More important, though, is the absence of an HD tuner or net TV functionality. These have quickly become staples of the flatscreen market, and it's almost impossible to recommend any TV that eschews them. In fact, the LD950 very much feels like a TV built for pubs, rather than peoples' homes. Which, of course, it originally was...

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: A screen-off mode is intended for radio and music listening, and cuts down consumption to a mere 40-50W

Test footage: Quite a high power consumption compared to LED-lit screens of a similar size

Contrast: ratio



Colour temp: Kelvin



Picture: The backlight is clearly visible with the 0IRE pattern, when viewing in darkness. By today's standards this isn't acceptable

Presets: There are three presets in the advanced settings and 'Warm' is spot-on as far as the 'ideal' was concerned.
Cool: 13,700K
Medium: 9,300K
Warm: 6,502K

HCC VERDICT

LG 47LD950
£2,500

Highs: Minimal crosstalk; natural Sky 3D image; good HD performer
Lows: Depth and motion blur issues with Blu-ray 3D; a bit expensive; average audio

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Competition

Five prizes up for grabs!



WIN! A surround sound system and SIX Blu-ray films! All enhanced by Dolby TrueHD audio...



DOLBY TRUEHD

Every AV-holic worth his or her salt knows you need a home cinema system with a sizeable TV to show full HD 1080p pictures, but that's only half the cinematic story. To make the most of Blu-ray movies your audio setup needs to be just as good. For that you need a surround sound system capable of dealing with Dolby TrueHD audio.

Dolby TrueHD's 100 per cent lossless sound technology puts you in the middle of the action, enabling you to enjoy a film's soundtrack exactly as the director intended, in immersive 5.1 or 7.1 surround sound. With TrueHD, effects are realistic enough to have you cowering from explosions, while dialogue punches through and soundtracks soar.

We've teamed up with Dolby and Paramount Home Entertainment to offer five *HCC* readers the chance to win a 5.1 home cinema system with Dolby TrueHD and HDMI plus six action-packed Blu-ray titles: *Monsters vs Aliens*, *Deep Impact*, *Star Trek*, *The Godfather*, *Eagle Eye* and *Indiana Jones™ and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull™*.

All you have to do to enter the competition is to visit the website at **www.futurecomps.co.uk/dolby** and provide the answer to the following question:

What is the speed of sound?

A: 1 m/s
B: 340 m/s
C: 299,792,458 m/s

Five lucky winners will be chosen at random from the correct entries. Closing date is 30 September.

Terms: By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futureTCS.com. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize. Monsters vs Aliens © 2009 DreamWorks Animation LLC. All rights reserved. Deep Impact TM & Copyright © 2009 by DW Studios L.L.C and Paramount Pictures and Amblin Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Star Trek Copyright © 2009 PARAMOUNT PICTURES. STAR TREK and related marks and logos are trademarks of CBS Studios Inc. All Rights Reserved. The Godfather TM, ® & Copyright © 2010 by Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. Indiana Jones & the Kingdom of The Crystal Skull TM & © 2008 Lucasfilm Ltd.. All Rights Reserved. Used Under Authorization. Eagle Eye: Copyright © 2008 DreamWorks LLC. All Rights Reserved.

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**TrustedReviews.com, 09/2009: Overall: 9/10

Home Cinema Choice, 01/2010:
"Absolutely brainsplitting dynamics", Overall: 4/5

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- Columns in an ultra-flat profile – only 8.3 cm deep
- Extremely flat 250 watt subwoofer for excellent bass performance

TrustedReviews.com, 06/2009:
"Plenty of warmth and emotion",
Overall: 9/10



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Teufel

A touch of glass

Alvin Gold won't be throwing stones at this vitreous speaker grouping

Here's something a little different: glass loudspeakers from the French brand, Waterfall. This system is reasonably affordable, but its 'entry-level' position has not deterred the designer from trying something innovative and, technically at least, the system is genuinely sophisticated.

The use of glass has clear (!) sound quality benefits, because of its inherent stiffness, and also some obvious aesthetic benefits. Glass has been used before in a number of loudspeakers, but Waterfall has done more than any other manufacturer to put the material on the map as a structural material for loudspeakers.

The speakers are not entirely made from glass, however. A completely hollow glass enclosure would have been very difficult to achieve without internal damping, which would have contradicted the reason for using glass in the first place. It would also have been prohibitively expensive to engineer. So, in this case, glass is used as the baffle material, to which the drive units are attached, with a compact aluminium enclosure with roughly the same shape and internal capacity as a hollowed-out half grapefruit bolted to the back.

The main satellite model here is the Serio, (we looked at this in *HCC* #177). It is a small unit with a flat square baffle made from thick plate glass with a detachable cover. The drive unit includes a cone mid/bass driver and a small diameter tweeter, which, according to the manufacturer, has a frequency response extending from about 120Hz, where the subwoofer takes over, all the way to 20kHz. One interesting feature is a technology called Heatstream, which couples the aluminium rear enclosure to the drive unit to help dissipate the heat, which builds up very quickly in such a small driver. This should result in smoother, more consistent behaviour and superior tracking of recorded dynamics.

The Serio is designed for the front and rear, left and right hand



Glassy eyed: The Waterfall array has immediate visual appeal

channels, which in many cases will correspond to the four corners of the room. Of course, you can buy additional Serio satellites, for example, should you want to build a 7.1 channel system. It is not meant for centre channel duties, where even more power handling is often required, and this task is handled here by a related, heavier duty model, the Elora, which is new to us. Most of its features are shared with the Serio, except that there are two main drive units, arranged side by side. There are also two flat baffles, in this case one in front of the other, with a narrow gap between them, resulting in a stronger, and heavier structure.

The High Force Evo subwoofer is the least innovative product of the three. It comes in a petite cuboid box, filled with a single driver powered by a 150W Class D amplifier, and it has speaker and line/LFE inputs, plus line outputs to drive a second subwoofer. Variable controls are available for level, the low pass filter (which you can pass on) and phase. It's undeniably cute and neatly done; this is not a subwoofer that's going to impinge on your living space.

The satellites can be used on shelves, or attached to walls, using the supplied fittings. They can also be used on dedicated stands, but these are quite expensive extras.

AV/CV

Product: Compact 5.1 channel speaker package

Positioning: Entry level in Waterfall's range under the heavier Elora satellites

Peers: Focal JMlab Dome; Tannoy Arena Lite



Performance

On the whole and with some caveats, the Waterfall system performs comfortably ahead of expectations for such a small 'fashion statement'. Playing music from CD through just a pair of the Serio satellites produces a **grown up sound that is clear and articulate, with a gratifying boldness**, but at the same time it is also a little raw and edgy. Speech recordings are intelligible, and are easy to follow, but the sound isn't the most graceful in its class and the overall balance is dry. This is not a great choice as a music-only package, but it was not meant to be.

Building the system up to its 5.1 channel configuration goes a long way to minimising its shortcomings. The sub not only extends bass, but also adds warmth to the sound, provided you carefully fine-tune the controls to achieve this. Waterfall recommends using the sub in a corner, but I would add that it should be as close to the satellites as possible, even if this means not placing it directly in the corner, but close to the wall behind the front satellites. Corner positioning does add depth and weight that's otherwise unavailable from this system, but the gain is not a critical one, and carries with it the trade-off that the bass appears to become less even and more dependent on where you sit within the room.

The final step is adding the additional centre and rear (surround) satellites, and here the Waterfall system presses all the right buttons. As all the satellites have the same acoustic design, the sound is consistently homogenous, with clean transitions. The centre speaker will handle a substantial amount of power, and dialogue cuts through even complex mixes very effectively, while the surround effectively expands and opens out the soundstage. I was impressed by the way soundtracks came alive, though there isn't the muscle and scale to cope with complexity: *Cloverfield* for example was rather small in scale and a tad undernourished as a result.

Overall then, this isn't the smoothest sounding system and there are obviously limitations of scale, but it's clean and detailed and visually a complete knockout. Your interior designer will love it

→ Specifications

Waterfall Serio satellite (L, R, surround)

Drive Unit: 1 x 4in bass driver and 1 x 1.25in silk dome tweeter in coaxial drive unit
Enclosure: Sealed, aluminium & glass
Frequency Response: 100Hz-28kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power Handling: 200W
Dimensions: 125(h) x 125(w) x 85(d)mm
Weight: 1kg

Waterfall Elora Centre speaker

Drive Unit: 2 x 4in bass drivers and 1 x 1.25in silk dome tweeter
Enclosure: Sealed, aluminium & glass
Frequency Response: 120Hz - 28kHz
Sensitivity: 90dB
Power Handling: 200W
Dimensions: 190(h) x 420(w) x 70(d) (mm)
Weight: 6kg

Waterfall High Force Evo subwoofer

Driver: 1 x 8in
Enclosure: Direct radiating, sealed enclosure
Frequency Response: 38Hz-150Hz (variable via low pass filter)
On board power: 150W
Dimensions: 280(h) x 250(w) x 260(d)mm
Weight: 15kg
Connections: 2 x phono inputs (line level); 4mm binding posts (speaker level); 1 x phono output(line level)



HCC VERDICT

Waterfall 5.1 speaker system
£1,500 Approx

Highs: Attractive; flexible positioning; clean and detailed sound quality
Lows: Rough-edged sound; lacks muscle and scale

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Sony sizes up

Sony's flatscreen lineup now includes this 3D-capable 60in behemoth. **Mark Craven** has a whale of a time

Sony may have followed behind Panasonic and Samsung in releasing its 3D TVs, but the Japanese giant is wasting no time making its presence felt in the new market with an extensive range of LED-lit screens. The biggest, and best, of the bunch is this 60in flagship model, the KDL-LX903.

It may be outmuscled in size by Panasonic's 65in plasma (see page 36), but this is still a large TV, bigger than anything Sony has produced for quite some time, in fact. Luckily, it's pretty slim (64mm) and features the brand's minimalistic Monolith design, so it holds its size well, but it's also heavy. Don't try to lift it out of its packing on your own; you wouldn't want to drop this £3,500 monster onto your coffee table or do yourself an injury into the bargain.

The extra real estate provided by this 60in TV is always welcome for serious home cinema viewing, and it's even more relevant with 3D. Having witnessed the extra dimension on screen sizes from 40in to 103in, and at the IMAX cinema, I'm already convinced that **the 3D effect is better the bigger the screen gets**. The more your vision is filled by the 3D images – rather than the wall next to your screen – the more likely you are to experience the 'wow factor' that 3D strives to deliver.

With *Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs* on 3D Blu-ray, the LX903 serves up a solid, captivating experience, but crosstalk is there if you look for it, and the shimmering nature of the next-generation format soon had me hankering for standard 2D high-definition viewing.

Flattering flatness

In fact, it's in flat-o-vision where the LX903 excels, as it's capable of delivering a very natural-looking, cinematic HD picture. With the Warm 2 setting engaged (which our tech labs measured at 7,000K), *Flight of the Phoenix* on Blu-ray offered true, but never over-saturated colours, solid black levels and sharp, well-detailed images. All this helps the Sony achieve a sense of depth.

Dedicated tweakers can get a 6,500K white point via the 'Advanced' menu. One picture mode that should be avoided with BD is 'Vivid'. Not only does this ramp up colours to an unrealistic level, it also engages Sony's Motionflow technology. I found this worked very well – too well, actually, smoothing motion to such an extent that film characters seem to be sliding around on ice skates. Not a good look, unless you're watching *Slap Shot*...

Meanwhile, television content delivered by the screen's own Freeview tuner did cause a bit of a shock. *BBC News 24* in standard def isn't necessarily the kind of channel you'll want to see blown up to this size. Thankfully, the three high-definition channels in the Freeview roster are far better. If you're thinking of investing in this set, I'd advise feeding it an HD-heavy diet.

As the pinnacle of Sony's current flatscreen range, the LX903 comes armed to the teeth with extra features. These include: the aforementioned Motionflow (here in the 200Hz Pro guise); 2D to 3D conversion (a novelty, but nothing more); the impressively well-stocked Bravia Internet Video service; Bravia Internet Widgets; integrated wi-fi; the XMB interface and playback of media files over USB or a network. The screen also ships with two pairs of the brand's TDG-BR100 3D glasses, which are reasonably comfortable.

Combine that with the 60in screen and the much improved build quality over the HX models and you have an impressive package. It's not going to topple Samsung's UE55C9000 as our current dream LED TV, but it comes in at half the price, which may very well make all the difference to you



AV/CV

Product: 60in 3D Freeview HD TV

Positioning: This is Sony's flagship TV in its Signature series

Peers: Samsung UE55C9000; LG 55LX9900



Stick to high-definition fare and you'll be rewarded with captivating images

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: Darken the room, and this figure drops by around 30W



Test footage: A good figure, with volume maxed, default picture settings and a bright room.

Contrast: ratio



Picture: In its default standard mode, but with the light sensor off, the LX903 delivers a commendable contrast ratio

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: Of the presets, the best ('warm 2') is still some way off the 6500K ideal. However, a full range of adjustments (R/G/B gain/bias) are available.
Cool: 11,300K
Neutral: 10,400K
Warm 2: 7,000K

→ Specifications

3D Ready: YES
Full HD: YES 1080p24
Tuner: YES Freeview HD and analogue, plus CI slot
Component video: YES 1
HDMI: YES 4 v1.4 (2 side-mounted)
PC input: YES 15-pin D-Sub
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): N/A
Dimensions (w/o stand): 1,440(w) x 906(h) x 64(d)mm
Weight (w/o stand): 42.8kg
Features: Edge LED; Bravia Internet Video/Widgets; Bravia Engine 3 processing; Intelligent Presence Sensor; Motionflow 200Hz PRO; File playback (JPEG, MP3, AVCHD, DivX and MPEG4 from USB; JPEG, LPCM, MP3, MPEG2 and AVCHD via network); PiP; PaP; XMB interface; integrated wireless LAN; Ethernet; 1 RGB Scart; USB 2.0 input; optical output; built-in 3D sync transmitter; 2 pairs of 3D glasses supplied; DLNA-certified

HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-60LX903
£3,500

Highs: Cinematic HD pictures; excellent online portal; involving 3D experience; intuitive GUI
Lows: 2D-3D conversion is unconvincing; unimpressive audio

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★ BEST BUY

3D for the masses

For its second 3D deck, Panasonic has gone back to basics, says **Steve May**



With the DMP-BDT100, Panasonic has extended its 3D Blu-ray proposition down to the mass market. The brand's first 3D player, the DMP-BDT300, was a highly-polished performer; this model not so much cuts corners as neatly bevels them.

The deck has been designed to work solely in an HDMI v1.4 environment, there being no secondary HDMI output or analogue audio bank to deliver lossless audio into legacy equipment. It's been targeted at those who simply want to connect directly to a 3DTV. If buyers hanker for lossless DTS-HD MA or Dolby TrueHD they'll need to spring for a new AV receiver with HDMI v1.4, or take advantage of an all-in-one system with Audio Return Channel.

The unit itself is smart enough. A flap lowers to reveal an SD card slot and USB port. The latter can be used with Panasonic's DY-WL10 Wi-Fi adaptor (sold as an optional extra), if you don't want to use a wired network connection.

With its DLNA branding you might expect the BDT100 to smugly play all media across your network, but you'd be wrong. If you have one of this season's Panasonic Blu-ray recorders on your network, this deck can access and play content from that machine. However, it cannot play media across a network (even though it lets you browse to UPnP devices). File playback only extends as far as an attached USB device. My assortment of AVIs and MKVs could only be played from a USB flash drive.

While supporting BD-Live, the player has no internal memory onboard (so you'll have to add your own). It can also access the Blu-ray version of Viera Cast (which does not have identical content to the brand's TVs). Pickings are still relatively slim, and include YouTube, Bloomberg, Daily Motion, Weather and Picasa.

Hey good lookin'

It may not deliver the same video performance as the BDT300 (measurable characteristics are quite different), but I would nevertheless regard video quality as excellent. A combination of extreme sharpness and stability with nuanced colour ensures both 2D and 3D Blu-rays look pristine. Kudos goes to the PHL Reference Chroma Processor Plus and Adaptive High Precision 4:4:4 signal processing.

The player is also refined as a CD spinner, and while it may not be audiophile grade (dynamic range peaks at 91.7dB), imaging is spacious and enjoyable. Tweakers should investigate the 96kHz Re-Master modes (accessed from the handset) that fine-tune frequency response.

Panasonic has yet confirmed a price point for the BDT100, but we expect it to be around £250. Even if it's lower than that (and despite its top-notch AV performance), I expect it could struggle against its better-specified competition: the DLNA function is limited and online content via VieraCast lags behind the portals of rival brands Sony and Samsung.

→ Specifications

3D: YES Upscaling: YES over HDMI
Multiregion: NO Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 1 v.14 Component: YES 1 set
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES optical
SACD/DVD-A: NO Profile 2.0: YES
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: YES
Dimensions: 430(w) x 66(h) x 245(d)mm Weight: 2.6kg
Features: Optional Wi-F dongle; (limited) DLNA support; file playback from USB, Viera Cast; Remaster audio processing

Polished performer: The BDT100 likes an HDMI v1.4 environment, but is picky about playing media files across a network

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Fairly low for this sort of device, so your carbon footprint won't be too heavily impacted



Playing: Usage jumps up to 15W when spinning a disc, but that's still an okay figure

Audio Jitter: Ps



Sound: Not a bad analogue jitter figure for non-audiophile gear

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & disc access
3s

Tray in to main BD menu
55s

Disc loading & Java: These are identical to the figures of the BDT300

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMP-BDT100
£TBC

Highs: Excellent video performance; solid CD playback
Lows: Unconvincing DLNA function; scant Viera Cast content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Best bar none, or bar humbug?

Chris Jenkins tests a soundbar that defies expectations

As an alternative to a full-blown surround sound speaker system, the soundbar has the advantages of compactness and simplicity, but few have the power to rival the real thing. This one challenges that notion, consisting as it does of a single bar of eight drivers, designed to sit under your flatscreen TV, plus a separate 6in subwoofer. The T12 uses a spatial stereo sound processing system, which does a creditable job of filling a room, without limiting you to a single 'sweet spot'.

The 20+20+40W system delivers a commendable performance, and watching a Blu-ray of *Sherlock Holmes* with the airSOUND system switched on we got plenty of spatial sense, though not, of course, a full surround experience.

The soundbar has a rotary digital volume control on the back, in addition to the remote control which also has iPod control functions. Inputs include digital coaxial and optical for connection from the TV, and a 3.5mm stereo auxiliary input. Impressively, there's also an iPod docking port with charging function and video output.

Highs

- Creditable pseudo-surround audio.
- Easy to install and use, with a smart black lacquer finish, which will match most modern TVS and superb overall styling.
- Reasonably priced compared with some other television sound enhancement products.
- Energy efficient compared to a surround system.

Lows

- Rather unconvincing music performance that fails to deliver a very coordinated sound.
- Wired connection is required from the soundbar to the subwoofer, where wireless would have been a more elegant and practical solution.
- No separate volume controls for soundbar and subwoofer.



HCC VERDICT
Orbitsound T12 soundbar
£300 Approx
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

The T12 sits discreetly under your flatscreen

Q ACOUSTICS Q-TV2 → £329 Approx → www.qacoustics.co.uk

Wraparound speaker pairing

Chris Jenkins tests an invisible sound-boosting option

We looked before at the Q-TV, which can boost the sound output of your flatscreen TV, without the tangle of wires of a full surround speaker system. The Q-TV2X is essentially the same but bigger.

To recap, Q-TV is a 2.1-channel amplifier/speaker system, which clamps to the back of your flatscreen TV, its side speakers peeping around the sides, so that the system is almost invisible in use.

The part behind the screen incorporates the 100W amplifier and an ultra-flat, vibration-free 50W subwoofer (the TV can still be wall-mounted, using an extra adaptor bracket), while the 25W side speakers, with their four BMR drivers, can be adjusted and angled to fit around your set. The Q-TV2X fits panels of 42 to 55ins, while the Q-TV2 is for screens of 30 to 42ins.

Features include: three EQ settings; a digital 'lip-sync' timing adjustment; volume control from the Q-TV2 remote, or the TV remote, and an auxiliary input connection for iPods and the like. Sound performance makes an immediate leap by flatscreen TV standards; a simple A/B comparison demonstrates this, but after a while you realise that the improvement is mainly in sheer volume.

Highs

- Offers a real boost to TV sound performance and once fitted is pretty much invisible in use.
- Can be controlled (in most cases) from the TV remote.

Lows

- Simple to fit from scratch, but a bit of a faff if your TV is wall-mounted.
- There are better-sounding alternatives for the same money.



HCC VERDICT
Q Acoustics Q-TV2X
£329 Approx
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

In Brief

Crackdown 2 (Xbox 360)
Microsoft Game Studios
£50 approx



This long-awaited sequel certainly makes gamers feel as if they have superpowers, as the characters leap across rooftops, battling both criminal gangs and zombies. In multi-player it's a delight, but tends to be a bit repetitive in single player, so stops short of full marks

1 2 3 **4** 5

ADVERTISEMENT











Home Cinema

...so good, being there is the next best thing?

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that meets your expectations in terms of quality of picture and sound? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the

"...the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level."



system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

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LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
SERVICE	★★★★★
FACILITIES	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

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216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY
9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA
69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street.020 8567 8703

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI
441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR
Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.
0131 555 3963

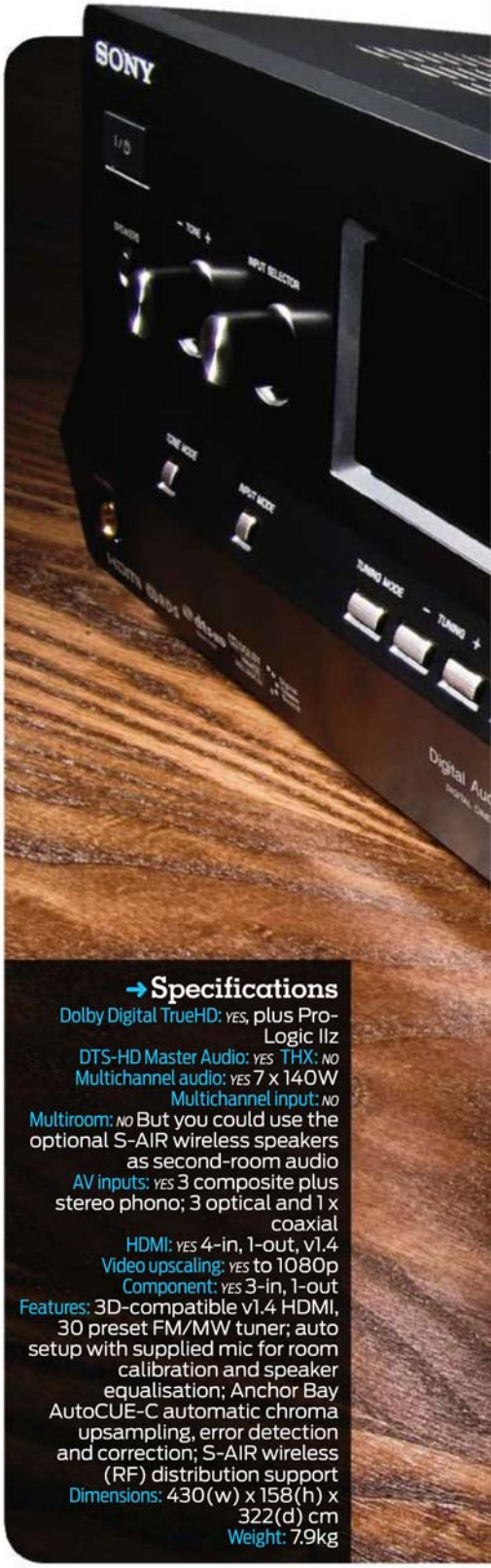
Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO
135 Great Western Road.
0141 332 2200/4707

CEDIA® BADA the symbol of security

The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

Magnificent seven

Far from being a nondescript box, this 7.1-channel amp comes packed with all the latest technology. **Alvin Gold** is bowled over by its good value



Were you to catch the prime movers and shakers at Sony at an unguarded moment or ply them with drink, many would admit that, until comparatively recently, the company was going through a dull patch lasting some years. There was nothing wrong with what they made, but somehow many of their mainstream products lacked the pizzazz historically associated with the brand. Denon and Yamaha seemed more on the ball with technical (and sometimes also sonic) innovation and, more recently, Onkyo has stolen a march on most others with their combination of technical wizardry and impressively low prices.

But Sony appears to be fighting back. Okay, so the STR-DH810 obeys all the usual clichés of mainstream receiver design. That is to say it looks boring, and lacks personality – if you removed the Sony badge, there would be no way of identifying where it came from. Even Sony can only find one thing of interest to say about its receiver's front fascia: that it employs a new 10-digit dot matrix for a sharp and clear display.

But dig a bit deeper into the STR-DH810 and it's a different story. I was surprised to find that it was widely on sale at an unfeasibly low £300, especially as it soon became apparent that it is a bit better than you might expect. It could easily form the core of a quite sophisticated system, offering many of the latest tech tools such as a 3D passthrough and upconversion from composite and component (PAL/576i or NTSC/480i) video to HDMI. Another weapon in Sony's armoury is Anchor Bay's AutoCUE-C, which removes the artifacting associated with the chroma upsampling errors associated with some DVD players and set-top boxes.

The receiver comes with a programmable, multi-component remote, and it even allows a slightly-limited wireless speaker capability called S-AIR (though you'll need to add some external hardware, and, for a variety of reasons, this is not an option I would normally advocate). Yet on a purely-practical basis, it's laudable; **S-AIR is intended for wireless surround, or painless multi-room**.

The STR-DH810 is a full-on 7.1 channel receiver, with a nominal (okay, hopelessly optimistic!) 140W per channel. Our Tech Labs rate it as 50W per channel (and that's with only five of the possible seven driven), which puts it in line with similarly priced rivals. This over-hyping of power output is a deception that is all too widely practiced in the industry, particularly at this end of the market.

A look inside the unit reveals a relatively small mains transformer – a key component of the all-important power supply. Not even the corporate might of Sony can magic up reserves of juice from nowhere. Internal construction is excellent, Sony having clearly paid a lot of attention to such matters. The company is of the opinion that chassis rigidity can influence sound quality; much like a car, the STR-DH810's strengths in this area are derived through clever design rather than throwing mass at the problem. Indeed, this AVR is fairly lightweight by contemporary standards.

Digital delights

Rear-panel furniture is not as extensive as you'll find in more upmarket receivers, but still generous enough to offer inputs for most practical purposes. The only notable omissions are S-video and a multichannel audio input – but the target customers for the STR-DH810 are unlikely to possess a collection

→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: *YES*, plus Pro-Logic IIz
DTS-HD Master Audio: *YES* THX: *NO*
Multichannel audio: *YES* 7 x 140W
Multichannel input: *NO*
Multiroom: *NO* But you could use the optional S-AIR wireless speakers as second-room audio
AV inputs: *YES* 3 composite plus stereo phono; 3 optical and 1 x coaxial
HDMI: *YES* 4-in, 1-out, v1.4
Video upscaling: *YES* to 1080p
Component: *YES* 3-in, 1-out
Features: 3D-compatible v1.4 HDMI, 30 preset FM/MW tuner; auto setup with supplied mic for room calibration and speaker equalisation; Anchor Bay AutoCUE-C automatic chroma upsampling, error detection and correction; S-AIR wireless (RF) distribution support
Dimensions: 430(w) x 158(h) x 322(d) cm
Weight: 7.9kg

AV/CV

Product: 7.1 channel AV receiver with HDMI v1.4

Positioning: Sony's entry-level model

Peers: Onkyo TX-SR308; Yamaha RX-567



of 5.1 SACDs or DVD-A discs, never mind compatible hi-res playback equipment.

There are four HDMI v1.4 inputs, which should just be enough for the kind of buyer that this budget AVR is aimed at. It is this adherence to the latest revision of the HDMI standard that readies the STR-DH810 for 3D and the flexibility of the 'audio return channel'. Shame there isn't an extra port sited round the front, though. I'd have swapped one of the trio of component inputs for a little more HDMI flexibility.

The STR-DH810 has seven pairs of 4mm speaker binding posts, which amply provides for front height speakers to be connected, if you decide to experiment with Dolby's Pro-Logic IIz surround format. The main front speakers can also be bi-amplified, or you can opt to run a more traditional 7.1 setup with surround-back channels.

There are two terminals that may be unfamiliar: one is labelled 'Digital Media Port' (DMPORT), and is intended for Sony aftermarket accessories like iPod docks and >

HDMI honey: Uniquely for a receiver at this price point, the STR-DH810 offers 3D support up to 1080p thanks to HDMI v1.4



Up to you: The sixth and seventh channels can be used to bi-amp the fronts L/Rs, or for surround back or front height

Bluetooth adaptors. The other is a recessed connector labelled 'EZW-T100.' Into this slot will plug the optional wireless transmitter/ transceiver, which is part of the aforementioned S-AIR system.

As part of its basic setup, the STR-DH810 includes a slightly more than routine auto-calibration function that Sony calls DCAC (Digital Cinema Auto Calibration). covering the presence and polarity (phase) of speakers, speaker distance, level and basic equalisation. To achieve all of this, the unit comes with a matching calibration microphone. This is **pretty comprehensive for what is after all a budget AVR**.

The STR-DH810 has been through an audio tuning exercise, independent of the headline features already mentioned, and includes wide-band phase-accurate power amplifiers, a new audio circuit-layout with shorter signal-paths and some detail improvements to the design of the power supply and its layout within the chassis, compared to previous models.

Performance

Taking price into account, the performance of this AVR was both surprising and gratifying, though it is quite likely that many users will never fully get to grips with its extensive capabilities.

After connecting it to our Onkyo DV-DB502 Blu-ray player and display, one of the first tasks the Sony was put to was playing Wagner's *Tristran und Isolde* – in our case, the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack of a Blu-ray issue. This is heavy-duty material whose sound is generally very dense in texture, and sonically intense in a way that more mainstream material seldom achieves.

The result, though slightly short of the highest standards, was nevertheless listenable, and generally did justice to the music. But DVD and Blu-ray movie material is really what this amp is about, and it made a great fist of multichannel material. *Cloverfield* (Blu-ray, Dolby TrueHD) delivered an immersive and realistically-scaled image.

Dolby Pro-Logic IIz also allows the addition of extra front high speakers above the standard front speakers with 5.1 channel soundtracks. This gives a height dimension that would otherwise be missing, and which is impressive with suitably-encoded 5.1 channel material. Dolby Pro-Logic IIx works similar magic, by adding audio to back-surround speakers. If you have the right setup, you can switch freely between Pro Logic IIx and Pro Logic 11z and decide for yourself which works better.

Leaving aside the complications of additional speakers, many people will simply not have room for extra boxes. So, the STR-DH810 also offers the option of adding a bi-amplified output for the front main L/R speakers, and this is certainly worth doing if you want to add muscle and consistency to music reproduction as well as dynamic movie material.

Exceptional value

The verdict here is no surprise. The Sony doesn't set new standards for sound quality, but what it does do is cover the standard bases, and sound significantly better than you might expect for a £300 receiver. There are shortcomings, though, such as the patterning akin to (but not quite the same as) moiré with some video material, for example, but the STR-DH810 is, by any standards, exceptional value for money

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Just ticking over, this AVR needs 45W. Switch it to standby when it's not in use



Powered: With seven channels going, the DH810 draws a hefty amount of power

Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



2-channel 8Ω: A 60W figure into 8Ω is below the claimed 100W, but still a reasonable performance for a low-end AVR



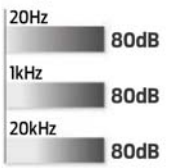
5-channel 8Ω: Step up to five channels driven and power output drops to 50W per channel

Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall: A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.06% THD, 8Ω, 1kHz), this Sony rates similarly to its current rivals, but, curiously, not as well as last year's model

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: Uniform measurements across all frequencies – solid but not spectacular



HCC VERDICT

Sony STR-DH810
£300 Approx

Highs: Flexible and (mostly) easy to drive; impressive sound; great value
Lows: Some coarseness and lack of weight when used at high volume levels

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5



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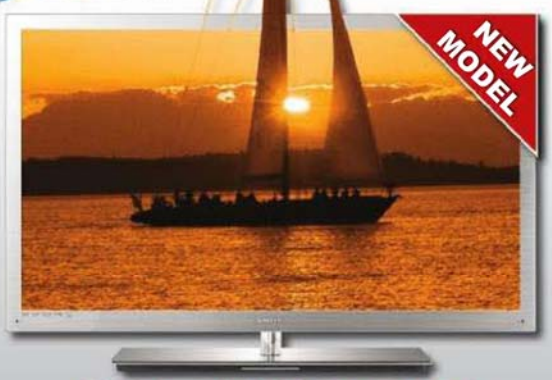
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Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras



PIONEER KODO XW-NAV1

Approx £250

Many Blu-ray decks come with iPod docks, but we've yet to see an iPod dock with a Blu-ray player. Pioneer's bedroom and kitchen-friendly XW-NAV1 comes close, featuring a DVD drive and an HDMI output capable of piping 1080p upscaled pictures to your secondary TV. Audio-wise it boasts Dolby Digital decoding with Virtual Surround and two 10W speakers. And with terminals for iPod and USB devices it can playback most common multimedia files including MP3, DivX, WMA and JPEG files. Another nice touch is the ability to rip from CD to USB, although when it comes to watching video on an iPod, we'd rather go without than use the mandatory ropey, old composite video connection that comes as standard on all iPod docks.

www.pioneer.co.uk

HCC VERDICT
Versatile and Apple-friendly

VERBATIM MEDIASHARE From £150

Installing a server as part of a network needn't necessarily require the services of an IT department and banks of hard disks in the basement. Verbatim has just introduced its MediaShare Home Network Server, which is designed to be consumer friendly. Available in 1TB and 2TB configurations for £150 and £200 respectively, the DLNA-compliant MediaShare is not only aesthetically sympathetic to your average AV setup, it also comes with a simple-to-use interface: an Easy Transfer button single-handedly transfers content directly to the server from any portable hard drive, flash drive or single slot card reader connected to the front USB port. MediaShare also supports Apple Time Machine for Mac users as well as Windows Backup.

www.verbatim-europe.com

HCC VERDICT
Good news for non-techie users with a passion for networking



SUPRA HF100 HDMI CABLE

From £60

Non-flexible cables that need to curve are subject to strain. The solution is a bent connector that is supplied with Supra's HF100 MET-B high speed HDMI cables. They meet the latest v1.4 standards, offer halogen-free insulation, long-life jacketing and 0.8 micron gold plating on HDMI pins for longevity and reliability. The standard HDMI connectors can be removed and replaced with the bent ones.

www.supracables.co.uk

HCC VERDICT
Wins our 'good idea' award!





OPTIMUM FURNITURE

Approx £250

AV furniture specialist Optimum has expanded its portfolio with a range of stands called Reflection that offer 'sleek design' and a 'contemporary high gloss finish', as their name suggests. The flat-packed stands measure 1m wide and can house four AV components, as well as screens up to 46in, on their toughened safety glass shelves. The range comes in both curved and angular styles in black, white and oak options.

www.optimuminternational.co.uk

HCC VERDICT

Combines contemporary cool with good storage



GENIUS GHP-04NC NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES

From £160

Enjoying music or watching a movie when travelling is infinitely more enjoyable when using a pair of noise-cancelling phones, especially when they haven't cost a fortune. Powered by AAA batteries, the GHP-04NC offer approx 50hrs of use, while its swivel ear pads will fit any shaped face. The phones can reduce noise levels by 15dB at 300Hz and come with a gold-plated 6.3mm stereo and dual-plug adapters plus a leather travel bag. Available directly from Genius or Maplin.

www.geniusnet.co.uk

HCC VERDICT

Extraneous ambient noise is one of the horrors of the modern age. You can't live without them!

Clips...

Small items that will make a big difference to your system

Vuzix Wrap



From £16.99 each

Ever watch movies on one of Vuzix's video glasses, but dislike looking like Roy Orbison? The solution is one of the company's interchangeable Wrap Fashion Shades that snap on to all current models of Wrap video eyewear, except the Wrap 920AR augmented reality set. The collection features four different colours: red, blue, amber and mirror. The Wrap glasses connect to a compatible video device (iPod video, camcorder, portable DVD player, etc) and deliver a 'bigscreen' experience straight to your eyes.

www.vuzix.co.uk

iRiver S100



From £130 approx

In the market for a small and affordable media player? The 4GB iRiver S100 may be just the ticket, offering a claimed 6hrs of video playback on its 2.4in TFT screen from a single charge. Video file compatibility comprises AVI, MP4, WMV, MPG and FLV, while audio includes MP3, WMA and WAV. An 8GB version is also available, for an extra £20, and microSD cards can be used to expand the integral memory.

www.iriver.eu.com

QED speaker cable



£4 per metre

Once the name of a moderately successful band in the Eighties, the letters XTC will soon be used by QED for its latest high-performance loudspeaker cable. On sale in September, the flex is a pure copper version of the company's award-winning Silver Anniversary XT version. The new incarnation uses X-Tube geometry, which allows fine adjustment of capacitance and inductance.

www.qed-cable-shop.co.uk

Competition

WIN! Fabulous Arena Soundstand AV units worth £599 each from furniture expert Alphason!



We have TWO Arena Soundstand AV units worth £599 each to give away to lucky readers!

Slim TVs are all very well, but the sound they deliver often isn't great. Having to squeeze a speaker system into a wafer-thin body inevitably compromises audio quality.

So AV furniture specialist Alphason has come up with a solution in the form of the Arena Soundstand – a plug-and-play, 2.1-channel sound system for flatscreen TVs. The stand is a beautiful piece of furniture that will complement your whole system, while effectively boosting sound.

Featuring a 100-watt speaker system and ultra slim subwoofer to deliver dynamic room-filling stereo sound with real bass, it is is easily connected to a TV, and you can also connect a CD player, MP3 player or other audio device using a spare input.

The prizes on offer are available in satin white or black, and feature passive ventilation, glass front doors, cable management features and disguised speakers. Sound volume is controlled via the TV's remote.

For further information on this and other exciting products in the Alphason range visit **www.alphasondesigns.com/studio**.

All you have to do to enter the competition is to visit the website at **www.futurecomps.co.uk/alphason** and provide the answer to the following question:

What would you expect to find in an arena?

A: Accountants
B: Gladiators
C: Plumbers

Two lucky winners will be chosen at random from the correct entries. Closing date is 22 September 2010.

The small print: By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futureTCS.com. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

...over **76 brands** ...with more being added every week!*

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- Visit the What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision stand at the Show for a dem and an answer to any questions you might have
- Run by Audio T in association with Sevenoaks Sound and Vision - the UK's largest independent hi-fi and home cinema chain, with over 50 stores nationwide
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South, Take the M6 motorway north towards Manchester and exit onto the M56

By train: Manchester Victoria Station is only a 5 minute walk. Piccadilly Station is only a 5 minute taxi ride or 10 minute walk.

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*Visit **www.manchestershow.co.uk** for all the latest information

Stealth subwoofers



KEF
KUBE-1
£350 Approx
KEF's entrant is a shiny-topped, fabric-wrapped cube, with simple controls and two 8in woofers: one passive, one driven by the onboard 200W amp.

REL
T3
£430 Approx
A woofer on stilts, as the dual metal hoops hold it off the floor. It's got one 150W-driven 8in cone on the front and one passive, loaded to the floor.

TANNOY
TS801
£400 Approx
The smallest of three Tannoy micro subs, with a 200W amp and one 8in driver. Its matt finish and blue-lit button panel/display make it easy on the eye.

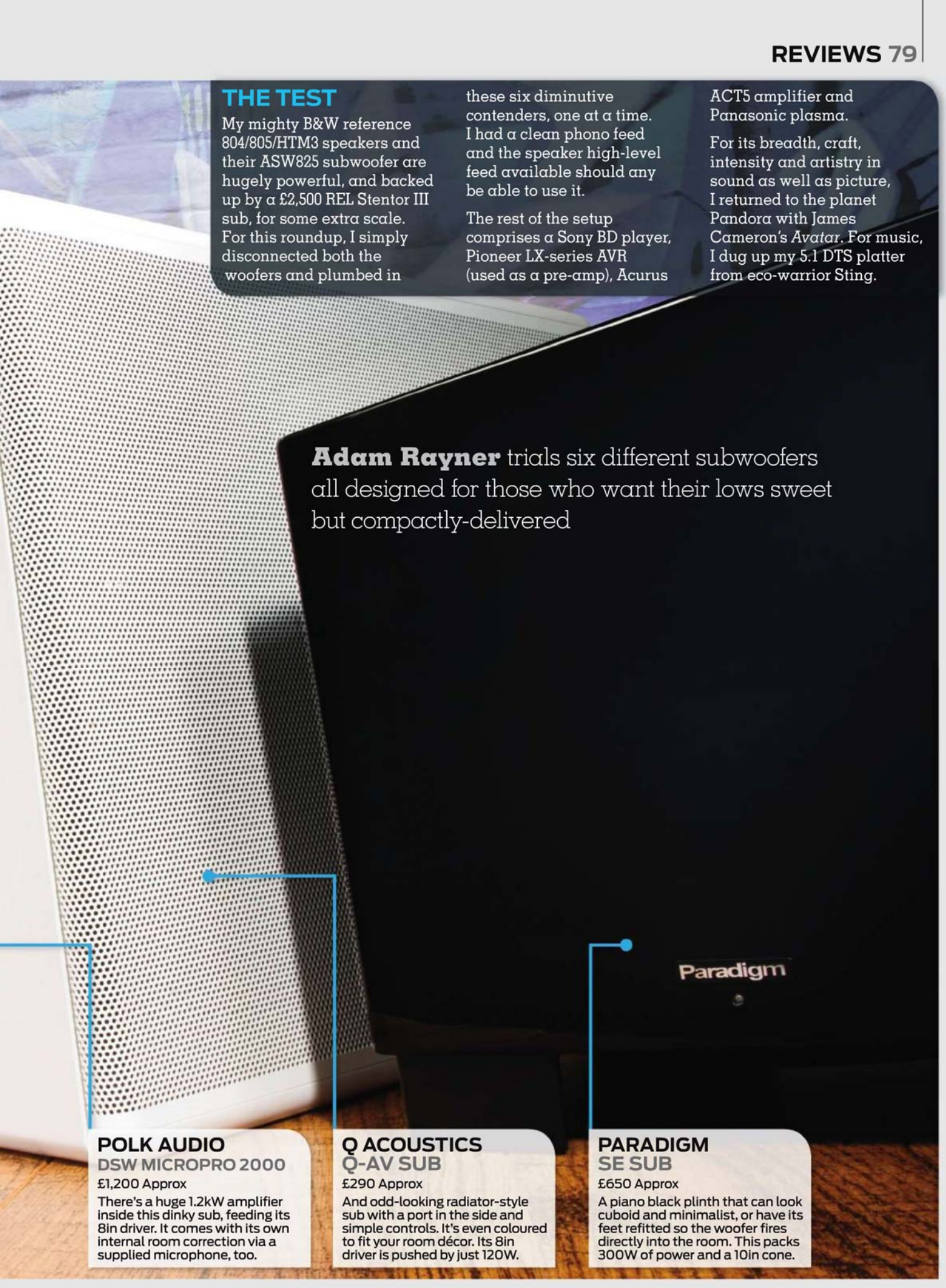
THE TEST

My mighty B&W reference 804/805/HTM3 speakers and their ASW825 subwoofer are hugely powerful, and backed up by a £2,500 REL Stentor III sub, for some extra scale. For this roundup, I simply disconnected both the woofers and plumbed in these six diminutive contenders, one at a time. I had a clean phono feed and the speaker high-level feed available should any be able to use it.

The rest of the setup comprises a Sony BD player, Pioneer LX-series AVR (used as a pre-amp), Acurus ACT5 amplifier and Panasonic plasma.

For its breadth, craft, intensity and artistry in sound as well as picture, I returned to the planet Pandora with James Cameron's *Avatar*. For music, I dug up my 5.1 DTS platter from eco-warrior Sting.

Adam Rayner trials six different subwoofers all designed for those who want their lows sweet but compactly-delivered



POLK AUDIO
DSW MICROPRO 2000

£1,200 Approx

There's a huge 1.2kW amplifier inside this dinky sub, feeding its 8in driver. It comes with its own internal room correction via a supplied microphone, too.

Q ACOUSTICS
Q-AV SUB

£290 Approx

And odd-looking radiator-style sub with a port in the side and simple controls. It's even coloured to fit your room décor. Its 8in driver is pushed by just 120W.

PARADIGM
SE SUB

£650 Approx

A piano black plinth that can look cuboid and minimalist, or have its feet refitted so the woofer fires directly into the room. This packs 300W of power and a 10in cone.

In these days of political correctness, we refer to 'Partner Acceptance Factor' when discussing how easily an item blends into your home. At the top-end of in-car audio we talk more bluntly about whether a product will be 'feature' or 'stealth'. You can have it as loud and pure as you wish, either with showy leather panels and chrome, or looking like it's just escaped from the car factory.

Likewise, speakers for home cinema use come in broadly different brackets, from being discreetly hidden, through small-but-pretty, to being a huge wealth and taste statement that dominates the décor.

But lots of us want our speakers to combine both subtle styling and a physical presence with top-flight performance. And while it is mostly blokes and wives who have these conflicting desires, both can manifest themselves in the same body if you have any flair for design.

There are an awful lot of speaker systems in the sector that is now somewhat archaically called the plasma TV market and hordes of 'home theatre in a box' systems out there, too. And as a general rule, they are worth every penny of their impossibly low price tags, as part of a bargain bucket.

But the feeling of fear and excitement, the visceral squeeze of your adrenal glands, that prickling of skin all over your mammal-hackles as you develop the hardest goose bumps imaginable... that's all provided by the subwoofer.

Thus, the niche for 'small but proper woofers' for theatre systems is heaving with kit. We picked six, starting modestly from £290, a serious tag that suggests some business-like bass, to a whopping £1,200, a price that suggests the awesomeness of *Kung Fu Panda,* capable of deep beauty and total wonderment. Let's go see if it did.

Design

So what did our selection consist of? Well, five petite cubes and another the size of a small aircon unit, or at least what looked like one, as the most design-led of the six was the Q-AV subwoofer. This outfit has the appearance of a white suitcase, which made me despair, fearing a triumph of design over function.

I had to eat my words, though, because the valise-shaped woofer was, in fact, a stonker, but more of that in a moment. It is available in black, but mine was pure white and even had a white mains lead and white wire-cover panel. It had a wall bracket, too, so you can Hoover under it when it is on the wall above your skirting board. It's unobtrusive and the speakers it's designed to complement are really wee.

The black, one-foot cubes included the KEF Kube-1, which is cloth-wrapped with a shiny top and a pair of 8in drivers bustling around

TANNOY TS 801
→ £400 Approx
→ www.tannoy.co.uk



In brief

The BASH amplifier in this 8in woofered lows-maker is 'only' rated at 200W RMS, but is said to offer the best of the Class D efficiency and Class AB sweetness, for more wellie. There is a 10in and 12in model in the range, but this one takes up less than a cubic foot, including its feet. It fires forwards from a sealed box, has a variable phase control, and a protection circuit to stop it over driving.

PARADIGM SE SUB
→ £650 Approx
→ www.paradigm.com



In brief

A real cutie, this is smart and sassy, and while the same size box is used to house an 8in driver, or even an 8in and a passive driver in others, in typical Paradigm style, they have used more driver area than anyone else and crammed a 10in into this small enclosure. If you want, you can also reconfigure your woofer to be front firing, rather than loaded against the floor, by moving the feet.

under the cloth (one driven and one passively wobbling).

I also had a matt black model with a neat cloth grille from Tannoy, called the TS 801 (with just the single 8in speaker driver in its face), and a simple piano black model on stumpy feet from Paradigm called the SE Sub10. The latter can have its speaker showing front-firing if you like, by moving the feet and replacing with little rubbery grommets. This one manages to cram a full one-size-up 10in driver in the same size box everyone else uses for an 8incher.

The REL T3 is cute and sits on stilts. The cubist box has a bulging round grille sticking out over one 8in woofer, while the metal frame holds the down-firing second 8in woofer the correct distance off the floor. Again, one is a wobbler to get the advantages of both sealed and ported performance. The REL was the only one in the roundup with a wood grain finish.

The Polk Audio DSW microPRO 2000 was also a shiny, piano black cube, but on one face it wears the maddest looking driver ever seen in any market. It has a circular hole with what looks like mostly rubbery inverted suspension in it. And in the middle, instead of a cone or even a flat pistonic thing, we get a disc of piano black laminate over the coil-driven piston underneath. This is less than a third of the driven area of the transducer and looks as crazed as the bit on the specification that says 1200W. There's a big old, square passive piston underneath as well.

Features

The included feature count varies in the group from a single volume knob, up to and including a microphone, 12V trigger output, remote IR eye socket and self calibration with doop-doop tones. Paradigm's PBK accessory kit is another story again and ours was PBK-ready.

The simplest sub is the Q-AV, as you just connect the speaker or line level and twiddle the gain knob. Next up would be the KEF Kube-1, as it too has little more than basic, easy to use controls. The Tannoy is also a cinch to get to grips with. Meanwhile, only the REL had the genius of connection by both line and speaker level, with a separate gain control for each to enable you to blend the inputs. This gets around the (inevitable) gaps in sound design in every movie, where big bass gets to the front channels but not to the woofer. Other brands copy this, but REL is the original user of the idea and it still works a treat.

The Polk comes with a microphone, a dinky remote and has four intelligent preset EQ curves (labelled as to room location: wall, corner etc.), There are phase control and other settings, too. It's very clever yet not complex.

Finally the Paradigm SE Sub10 can be accessorised with the >

Q ACOUSTICS Q-AV SUB

→ £290 Approx
→ www.qacoustics.co.uk



In brief

Looking like nothing more than a room humidifier or perhaps a small radiator, this odd product has a wall bracket and the poshest white mains lead you will ever see. It is meant to be loaded against a wall and maybe even installed in a corner to look like an air-conditioning unit. Available in black or white, the front grille is massive and easily removable if you want to get custom paint involved..

KEF KUBE-1

→ £350 Approx
→ www.kef.com



In brief

Like so much KEF equipment, this exudes an aura of class. It has a simple but neat tight cloth finish and uses two drivers, a driven 8in and one that wobbles. In common with a few here, this endows the best of both sealed and ported boxes with power, while also offering a nice, deep lower frequency cut off to cope with the demands of movie soundtracks.

Paradigm Perfect Bass Kit (PBK). This is a calibrated microphone and some software. You need a laptop and the extra kit, but the USB socket on the beast says all you need to know. It is an extra and, having seen it working, I know it is a powerful algorithm. This scores well for future upgradeability.

Performance

In review order: the Tannoy was good for what it was, a petite sub for a small room and musical with it. It was nice and meaty and posh, too, as it was fast and accurate, but unlike the others in the group, it's a fairly new product that's not had many years to evolve to its optimal best, and was consequently outclassed both on design/technology and output by all the other five. This is not for being poor, but for being merely good. You can hear the limits of both its cost and size when stretching it either with a reggae bass underneath Sting, or when trying to raise you hackles at the start of *Avatar*.

The Paradigm offers, as ever, more speaker cone for your enclosure than anyone else, and rather than the 200W amp the Tannoy could muster, had half as much power again at 300W. It was literally deeply impressive and, as well as eating the musical bass, tracked the lows all the way down to the bottom of the fear-register intro in *Avatar*, while maintaining genuine tautness.

The Q-AV I was so concerned about, shattered my preconceptions and, for the weediest 120W of muscle in the whole group, was just huge. Yet **the enclosure, so cunningly designed and bigger than the rest, produced astonishing results**. Fast, tight, deep and rich, it had scale issues but not as many as it should have. It's amazing for the money. I was gob smacked – or is that gut smacked?

KEF makes superb hi-fi and this Kube-1 sub is no exception, which may also be its slight downfall. While you can spend £40K and break your face with KEF speakers if you want, this is very much designed for a smaller room. Wherein you will find it musical and faster than even some of the better subs on test here.

Polk's DSW microPRO 2000 is a mad-end mega beast of speed, weight and power. It supported my entire B&W 800 system without caring and played both music and the fatness of *Avatar*'s wondrous opening with agility, depth and grip. It is a Rolls Royce among stealth woofers and a great indicator of how bigger ones might scare you.

Lastly, the REL T3 delivered the best balance of stupid amounts of performance for the money, coupled with cool features and pretty looks. It may not score the highest overall, but would certainly have been my own money choice. >

POLK AUDIO DSW MICROPRO 2000
→ £1,200 Approx
→ www.polkaudio.com



In brief

A subwoofer that looks like the rest, but is twice as costly and 10 times as powerful as the smallest-engined one in the group. It comes with a small microphone and is able to automatically run a room correction system. The DSW microPRO 2000 is the only one in this group of six to also have a remote control. The innovative 8in driver is a crazed-looking piston with a shiny piano black finish.

REL T3
→ £430 Approx
→ www.rel.net



In brief

The T3 is a small and unobtrusive item with a smart bulbous fixed grille over one woofer and a raw driver underneath, held off the floor by the dual frame pieces. This unassuming item is the baby of a legendary brand of seriously able woofers. It is unique in this group in that you are supposed to connect both speaker and line level inputs, and you get an individual balancing gain control for each one.

HDMI over single co-axial cable!



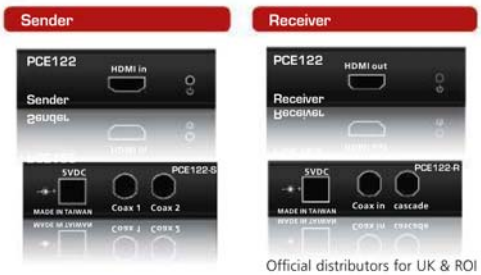
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Features:

- 120M HDMI 1080p video and 7.1channel audio One Cable transmission with Ultra High Quality Video
- Features World Leading Single Coaxial Transmission, designed to simplify Installation
- 1080p 120M / 720p 230M long distance Ultra High Quality Video with 7.1 channels surround sounds transmission
- Built-in 1 to 2 Coaxial Splitter in Sender and One Coaxial Cascade output in Receiver for great extension flexibility
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- BNC connector designed for solid dependable connection
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- Hassle free plug-n-play, install in seconds

Code PCE122	Transmitter & receiver pair	£515.78
Code PCE122R	Additional receive	£277.73

£515.78



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HDMI 4 Way Distribution Amplifier

One input to four simultaneous outputs

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supports up top 1080p at the same time
Distance: Source to Device-1.8m, Device to Device-15m,Device to Display-20m
Cascadable to 3 levels - provides up to 64 HDMI signals

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- Sends the HD signal uncompressed



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HDMI over IP Network!

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e.g. Fast Ethernet, Gigabit Ethernet, WLAN and HomePlug adaptors
Plug and Play, no configuration required



Code PB900 1 sender and 1 receiver pair **£375.00**
Code PB900R Additional receiver **£210.00**

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Converts analogue Scart or s-video into digital HDMI at a choice or resolutions up to 1080P. Great for connecting legacy equipment to an HDMI switchbox for simplifying your connections. Control is by front panel or supplied IR remote

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Code HDUSPRO **£85.00**

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- On-the-fly adjustment with no image overlay
- 36 user preset delays
- Remote control
- Automatic optical/coax conversion
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Code DD740 **£189.99**

Keene IR Distribution Amplifier

- External receiver routes IR signals to internal wands
- Control all your equipment even when inside a cabinet
- Works with all popular remotes
- Complete system, easy to install and ready to use



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1080p rated 10m length	HDHDV10	£32.99
Premium range 1080p rated 3m length	HDHD3	£29.99
Premium range 1080p rated 10m length	HDHD10	£49.99
Premium range 1080p rated 15m length	HDHD15	£59.99
professional range 2160p rated 1m	HDHDC1	£29.99
professional range 2160p rated 3m	HDHDC3	£39.99
plug professional range 2160p rated 7.5m	HDHDC75	£69.99
HDMI cables – Adaptors		
Mini Display Port to HDMI adaptor	MDPHDMI	£14.99
Video Conversion		
Scart to HDMI (1080P	HDUSPRO	£85.00
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Final Standings



To find the best high-performance yet small scale sub, I found myself with six models varying in price and design. Putting them in an order isn't an easy task, but here goes...

Holding up the rear for being merely 'good' is the TS801 from Tannoy, a relative newcomer to the sub market, followed by the KEF Kube-1. Again, this is a solid performer, but it's outclassed in both power and depth terms by the remaining four contenders. Both these two, though, are ideal for those with small rooms and a musical bent.

The Paradigm SE Sub10 is an excellent woofer, but it's bumped into fourth place by the astonishing performance of the inexpensive and pretty-looking Q-AV sub. In fact, the way this woofer is designed and can be installed in a room may make it the number one choice for some readers.

Split decision

Choosing between the final two is where it gets tricky. The REL offers its lovely smart input system, plus true heritage sound and weight for a bargain price of £430. On the other hand, Polk's DSW microPRO 2000 is packed with features, highly sophisticated and a triumphant performer, but costs £1,200. I've ranked them as joint first, as the size of your wallet will dictate your preference – the real bass enthusiast, but not a wealthy one, will buy the REL, while the consumer who's simply in the market for the best will splurge on a Polk

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Polk Audio DSW microPRO 2000
£1,200 Approx

Highs: Huge sound; easy to use controls; fabulously sophisticated
Lows: Over three times the price of similarly compact kit

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: Composite Piano Black finished Polypropylene 8in piston with rubber surround, plus 8in square passive radiator unit
Enclosure: Sealed but with a passive radiator
Frequency Response: 22Hz-200Hz
Onboard power: 1,200W
Dimensions: 280(w) x 321(h) x 324(d)mm
Weight: 15.4kg
Connections: High level inputs on speaker cable binding posts, plus single phono LFE input and phono paired stereo inputs and outputs

1ST



HCC VERDICT

REL T3
£430 Approx

Highs: An absurdly disproportionate sound for its small size
Lows: You must use both phono and Speakon plug speaker-level input

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: Heavy duty, ultra-long throw 8in with 8in ultra-long throw passive radiator underneath
Enclosure: Closed, box-sealed
Frequency Response: 30Hz-120Hz
On board power: 150W
Dimensions: 300(w) x 343(h) x 356(d)mm
Weight: 12.5kg
Connections: Single phono LFE input, plus single pho low-level input and Neutrik Speakon high-level (speaker) input with two gain controls

3RD



HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics Q-AV sub
£289 Approx

Highs: Very clever design with rich and deep sound
Lows: White surface gets dirty easily; slightly underpowered

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 8in long-throw drive unit
Enclosure: Side-ported enclosure to fire along wall
Frequency Response: NA-200Hz
Onboard power: 120W
Dimensions: 476(w) x 432(h) x 169(d)mm
Weight: 15.7kg
Connections: Stereo high level inputs and stereo phono inputs



Small but deadly: Can't fit a large woofer in your viewing room? One of these might be the solution

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Paradigm SE Sub 10
£650 Approx

Highs: Compact with cuboid good looks and high performance
Lows: Does have a scale limit due to size, but likes to have a go

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→Specifications

Drive Unit: 10in CAP™ coned driver with oversized ceramic/ferrite magnet and two-inch, four-layer voice coil
Enclosure: Configurable (by feet usage) down- or front-firing sealed enclosure
Frequency Response: 24Hz-150Hz
Onboard power: 300W
Dimensions: 279(w) x 291(h) x 279(d)mm
Weight: 6.4kg
Connections: USB port/Perfect Bass Kit interface, plus stereo phono input

5TH



HCC VERDICT

KEF Kube-1
£350 Approx

Highs: Neat with easy-to-use controls and a degree in polite musicality
Lows: Lacks some sheer grunt to go with the quality

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

→Specifications

Drive Unit: 8in cone, plus 8in ABR (Active Bass Reflex) passive radiator unit
Enclosure: Sealed but with a passive radiator
Frequency Response: 38Hz-150Hz
Onboard power: 200W
Dimensions: 295(w) x 295(h) x 295(d)mm
Weight: 9.6kg
Connections: Stereo RCA input only

6TH



HCC VERDICT

Tannoy TS801
£400 Approx

Highs: Cute control panel on top; smart looks; creditable performance for small rooms
Lows: Limited in power and scale

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

→Specifications

Drive Unit: 8in driver
Enclosure: Sealed box, forward firing
Frequency Response: 29Hz-150Hz
Onboard power: 200W
Dimensions: 300(w) x 300(h) x 280(d)mm
Weight: 9.8kg
Connections: Stereo RCA inputs and stereo binding post inputs

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PLAYBACK

→Software highlights **GREEN ZONE** The Bourne team tackle war-torn Iraq **PSYCHO** Relive the horror with Hitchcock's masterpiece on Blu-ray **REPO MEN** Jude Law cuts loose in this sci-fi thriller **JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS** Harryhausen classic gets hi-def makeover **CLASH OF THE TITANS** Is this remake a Kraken romp or a pile of Pegasus dung? **AND MUCH MORE!**

Hell's belles

Centurion→Region B Blu-ray

Is Neil Marshall's historical actioner a *Gladiator* beater? Find out in our in-depth Blu-ray review on page 88



HCC Ratings key

Norman Bates	1 2 3 4 5
Frank Booth	1 2 3 4 5
Patrick Bateman	1 2 3 4 5
Sweeney Todd	1 2 3 4 5
Henry Evans	1 2 3 4 5



The morning commute was harder than usual



Highland fling

Metal strikes metal in this blood-swilling take on the fate of the Roman Ninth Legion



HCC VERDICT

Centurion → Pathé → Region B
BD → £29 Approx

We say: A fine hi-def outing for this rip-snorting, blood-strewn, historical action-adventure

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Centurion finds writer/director Neil '*The Descent*' Marshall back on firmer ground after the slight misstep he took with his muddled sci-fi actioner, *Doomsday*.

This time around he's used the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the legendary Roman Ninth Legion in 117AD as the basis for a rip-roaring, blood-soaked period piece. The movie reworks *The Warriors*, where the Roman survivors of an ambush by the Pictish army find themselves trapped behind enemy lines, and have to dash for safety across inhospitable terrain, while pursued by the deadliest of enemies.

Mark Craven: Sometimes it's really hard to rate a Blu-ray transfer. Should we be more concerned with the comparative quality of the hi-def imagery the disc offers, or with its accuracy to the source material? The logical answer is somewhere between the two, which makes titles such as *Centurion* fairly tricky to assign a numeric score to.

This VC-1 2.40:1 encode is undoubtedly incredibly faithful to the original look of the film, but that look has been excessively graded to the point where it doesn't necessarily have the kind of visual pop you might expect. Blues and greens are pumped up to unnatural levels, with only fountains of red blood providing any other vibrant colour in the palette, while blacks have been flattened to the point where there is next to no shadow detail evident.



Nevertheless, many shots still reveal an abundance of fine detail, ranging from the textures of the costumes to the pores on the faces of the cast. It's a great reflection of how the film should look – just not what you'd necessarily choose to show off your new HDTV.

Steve May: If you want to test the high frequency reproduction of your speaker system, then *Centurion* is the wode-painted, gore fest for you. Thanks to copious swordplay and the ceaseless sheathing/unsheathing of blades, no other movie in history has as many schwings, krrings and klangs in its running time.

By way of a counterbalance, there's also prodigious LFE in the DTS HD MA 5.1 mix. Your bass box will rumble rhythmically as the Ninth legion stomp to their doom through the misty Pict-strewn highlands, plunging fast and low with every cleaved head. Overall, a veritable symphony of violence.

Anton van Beek: *Centurion* cuts a bloody swathe onto Blu-ray accompanied by a reasonable selection of extra features. Director Neil Marshall joins some other members of the crew for an informative commentary about the ins-and-outs of putting the film together and the changes it underwent during production; there's also a four-part 26-min *Making of...* documentary, six deleted scenes with optional commentary, an outtakes reel, the trailer (the only HD extra), a production design gallery and a photo gallery.

Clash of the Titans

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£27 Approx



This mega-budget remake of the 1981 fantasy flick somehow manages to be even more ponderous and disjointed than the original, but at least this HD version has the benefit of not suffering from the poor 3D conversion that afflicted its cinema release. This BD serves up a godly AV experience thanks to a warm and detailed VC-1 2.40:1 encode and powerful DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. Extras include a Maximum Movie Mode, 10 Focus Point featurettes, an alternate ending, deleted scenes, plus a DVD and Digital Copy of the film. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

The Ghost

Optimum Home Ents → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Ewan McGregor plays a ghostwriter hired to pep up the memoirs of a former British Prime Minister (Pierce Brosnan) accused of war crimes, only to stumble on a secret that certain people will kill to protect. In the hands of director, Roman Polanski, it's gripping stuff, and he is on top of his game here. The rain-swept visuals provide plenty of detail for the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode to bring to the fore, even if the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is rather more subdued than you might expect from the genre. Extras include two featurettes, a press conference, five interviews, the trailer and a photo gallery. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Hot Tub Time Machine

20th Century Fox → All-region A/B BD → £23 Approx



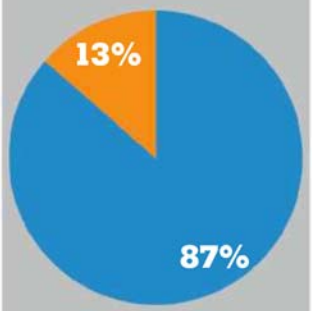
Three middle-aged friends try to recapture their youth only to end up travelling back to the 1980s in this raucous (and not entirely successful) mix of gross-out gags and *The Hangover*-style bromance. Never quite living up to the absurdity of its premise, it still delivers more than enough laughs to make it worth a rent, and the cast bring more depth to their characters than you might expect. This Blu-ray makes a real splash with its gaudy AVC 1.85:1 1080p visuals and lively DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. However, the extras are few. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

We asked you...

Who's the better filmmaker – Tony Scott or Ridley Scott?

- Ridley – Who cares if *Hannibal* was awful!
- Tony – From *Top Gun* to *Taking of Pelham*, he hasn't put a foot wrong



Results of poll from www.homecinemachoice.com

WMD delight

This Iraq War thriller mixes politics with punch ups











Green Zone reunites actor Matt Damon with the director of the last two *Bourne..* movies for a rather more politically-charged thriller set in the war-torn streets of Iraq. During a fruitless search for WMDs, Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller (Damon) starts to doubt the quality of the intel he is being given. Miller's investigations soon bring him into conflict with the Pentagon official (Greg Kinnear) overseeing the reconstruction of Iraq and whose motives aren't entirely innocent. At its heart, *Green Zone* may be a film that questions the motives behind the Iraq War, but it's also a cracking thriller perfect for those looking for top-notch action and escapism.

Mark Craven: Paul Greengrass adopts a deliberate vérité style for his latest action thriller. The VC-1 2.40:1 1080p encode copes especially well with the film's amber-hued palette and abundance of grain, and while fine detailing is generally excellent, it can be a little lacking in some sequences due to the odd intentionally soft shot. Contrast levels are low at times as well, but this too can be put down to the film's aesthetic style.

Steve May: Paul Greengrass's trademark fly-on-the-wall cinematography is counter-balanced here by a marvellous (albeit conventional action movie) DTS-HD MA 5.1 sound mix. With its masonry-ripping ordnance and chaotic Baghdad street scenes, it's easy to find yourself immersed in the film's disturbing reality. I found the concussive LFE of the fire-fights exhilarating, while the sonic arrhythmia of John Powell's score had me involuntarily finger-drumming in my seat.

Anton van Beek: It's a while since we've seen a traditional video commentary, but that's exactly what *Green Zone* brings with it on Blu-ray. Greengrass and Damon provide a fantastic chat track, discussing the shoot, the politics behind it and a whole lot more, which can be enjoyed in either plain audio form or as a video commentary via Universal's standard U-Control functionality, while another U-Control option takes the form of picture-in-picture, behind-the-scenes material. >

HCC VERDICT

Green Zone → All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: A smarter-than-usual thriller that dazzles on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Stop-motion masterpiece

Harryhausen's classic special effects epic looks stunning on Blu-ray

Jason and the Argonauts

is historical action-adventure at its very best, and what really makes this 1963 film stand the test of time are Ray Harryhausen's superb stop-motion effects. From the giant living statue of Talos, to the Hydra and, ultimately, an army of skeleton soldiers, the movie showcases the special effects legend at the pinnacle of his creativity.

Mark Craven: While the nature of the source material means that *Jason...* is never going to compete with the best-looking Blu-rays around, there's still a lot to admire about Sony's hi-def AVC 1.66:1 presentation of this classic film. Understandably, the special effects scenes are thick with grain and trapped dirt, but everything else looks simply incredible. The live-action footage is stunningly rendered with natural flesh tones and lavish detailing, which highlights the wear-and-tear in the characters' clothing and armour.





Steve May: As with *Psycho* (reviewed opposite), this seminal Sixties classic has also had its audio made over into 5.1 DTS HD MA, although you could be forgiven for not noticing. Once again, the original mono soundtrack has been deconstructed to create steerable channels, but the results are only moderately successful. The remix is at its best when the changes are modest, such as when Hercules strong-arms his way into the treasure tomb of bronze giant Talos, where the remix adds subtle echo and depth cues to create a sense of space. However there's little improvement in clarity between the mono original, presented here in Dolby Digital, and the lossless DTS alternative.

The insurmountable problem is that the original assets remain time-locked in Sixties cinema. Bernard Herrmann's melodramatic score is just too shrill, and spreading it wide doesn't really enhance the listening experience. Call me a traditionalist, but this is one film classic I'm happy to leave in its original monophonic state.

Anton van Beek: Unlike previous DVD releases, this Blu-ray comes with a godly collection of bonus features that will satiate the cravings of any Harryhausen fans. Best of the bunch is the feature-length commentary by the legendary man himself and film historian Tony Dalton, although a second track by Harryhausen fans, Peter Jackson, and visual effects artist, Randall William Cook, is also well worth a listen.

Also included are newly-found storyboards for the skeleton fight sequence, an interview with Harryhausen conducted by John Landis, plus the 58min documentary *The Harryhausen Chronicles* that looks back at his career.



HCC VERDICT

Jason and the Argonauts
Sony Pictures → All-region BD (US Import)
£15 Approx (www.movietyme.com)

We say: A spellbinding HD release for an adventure that stands the test of time, as well as the Greek myths its draws upon

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Fleeced: Jason wished he'd brought some mint sauce

The Innocents

BFI → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Jack Clayton's haunting 1961 adaptation of Henry James' classic novella *The Turn of the Screw* is a spine-chilling treat with superb performances, a creepy atmosphere and an ambiguous narrative. Freddie Francis's monochrome CinemaScope photography is handled beautifully by this Blu-ray's AVC 2.35:1 encode, with the enhanced clarity and detailing working wonders for the deep-focus cinematography. Equally impressive is the LPCM 2.0 audio mix, which is as comfortable with atmospherics as with dialogue. Extras include a documentary by Christopher Frayling. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Paranoiac!

Eureka → All-region BD
£18 Approx



While the Hammer studio will forever be synonymous with bigscreen TV spin-offs and Christopher Lee biting the necks of buxom barmaids, the studio also found plenty of success in other genres – as exemplified by this marvellous psychological thriller. A deliciously smarmy Oliver Reed stars as the nutty young chap contesting his sister's inheritance of the family estate due to her apparent mental instability. It also has visual panache to spare, something this disc's gorgeous black and white AVC 2.35:1 1080p transfer makes apparent. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Pandora and the Flying Dutchman

Park Circus → Region B BD/R2 DVD
£20 Approx



The legend of the Flying Dutchman was given a contemporary spin in this 1951 romantic fantasy, starring James Mason and Ava Gardner. The film doesn't quite manage to justify the 2.5hrs running time, although Mason is as watchable as ever, while Jack Cardiff's cinematography is simply fantastic. The Blu-ray's AVC 1.33:1 encode, sourced from a 'painstaking 35mm restoration', puts the lustre back in the film's Technicolor visuals, but there's still loads of scratches and other print marks evident throughout the disc. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Elvis

Fremantle → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Back in 1979, John Carpenter directed this wonderful TV biopic of the King of Rock 'n' Roll, which also marked his first collaboration with Kurt Russell. Rarely seen on these shores, this Blu-ray is a must-have for Carpenter fans if only because it features the full 168-minute version of the film. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p imagery scores highly on colour accuracy, but much of the print is dogged by minor print damage. The LPCM 2.0 audio is better, handling the dialogue and songs with consummate ease. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5



Do not disturb

Blu-ray's stab at Hitchcock's horror looks and sounds nothing short of awesome

Psycho is the kind of film that doesn't need any introduction. In the five decades since it first made cinema goers fearful of taking a shower, Alfred Hitchcock's murderous masterpiece has been analysed countless times. And if, for some reason, you haven't already seen it, then we're not about to spoil the cinematic delights that this unnerving chiller has in store for you.

Mark Craven: Given Universal's record for overzealously applying digital noise reduction that actually removed precious detailing from such catalogue releases as *Spartacus* and *Gladiator*, I approached *Psycho* with no small trepidation.

But I needn't have worried; whether the company has learnt its lesson or has treated this particular title with kid gloves, the result is simply spectacular. The dense grain structure is completely intact throughout the VC-1 1.85:1 encode, blacks are deep and lush, whites are sharp – resulting in beautifully nuanced images that the old DVDs simply can't compete with.

Steve May: The most recognisable score in motion picture history gets a dramatic update with this gorgeous re-mastering.

Kudos must go to the audio boffins at French outfit, Audionamix, who reverse-engineered the original monophonic stem to create multiple tracks that could be mixed and steered to create a 5.1 soundscape. Their work is surprisingly effective. Of course, purists can view the movie with its original audio presentation (in two channel mono DTS HD MA), but this new 5.1 DTS HD MA soundmix is more intriguing is. For the most part, the retconned steerage is subtle. You need to pay attention, for example, during the shower scene to detect the left to right travel of the shower curtain. But, there's no doubt that the soundstage is more spacious, creating an authentically involving ambiance for today's audience. And naturally, Bernard Herrmann's suspenseful score has never sounded better: the double bass goes deep, while his stabbing strings strip the wax from within your ear canal.

Anton van Beek: While almost all of the extras on this Blu-ray release have appeared on previous US DVD releases, not all of them have made it to these shores in the past, making their inclusion particularly satisfying this time around.

The recycled extras are the 94min *The Making of Psycho* doc; a featurette on Hitchcock's legacy; an audio-only interview by Francois Truffaut; newsreel footage; The Shower Scene with and without music; storyboards; production notes; a poster and ad gallery; lobby cards; behind-the-scenes photographs; publicity stills; two trailers; the *Lamb to the Slaughter* episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and a commentary from Hitchcock expert Stephen Rebello.

The single new extra (and the only one presented in HD) is *Psycho Sound*, an informative 10min look at creation of the Blu-ray's 5.1 remix.







HCC VERDICT

Psycho → Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx

We say: A sensational hi-def platter for Hitchcock's enduring horror

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Generation Kill

HBO → All-region BD
£40 Approx



This enthralling seven-part miniseries is based on journalist Evan Wright's articles for Rolling Stone, and details his time with the US Marine Corps' 1st Reconnaissance Battalion during the 2003 Iraqi invasion. Finally available on Blu-ray in the UK, it's definitely been worth the wait. The spectacular hi-def visuals with VC 1.78:1 1080p encodes, capture the series' rough and gritty aesthetics perfectly, while the visceral DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio really brings the battle scenes to life thanks to its LFE and purposeful directional effects. New interactive extras join the DVD ones. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 **5**

Sons of Anarchy: Season Two

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£34 Approx



Rapidly becoming one of the best US dramas currently airing, the second season finds the Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club Redwood Original (SAMCRO) coming up against white supremacists and trying to keep on the right side of the law by running a porn studio. Meanwhile, loyalties within SAMCRO continue to shift, due to the events of the first season, and its not long before the action heads into entirely unexpected territory. It looks and sounds spectacular thanks to the bold AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes and throbbing DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Hung: Season One

HBO → All-region BD
£40 Approx



Thomas Jane plays a down-on-his-luck high school teacher and basketball coach, who sets about making some extra money by becoming a male prostitute. As funny as this sounds, and despite excellent performances from Jane and co-star Jane Adams (as his hapless pimp), this first 10-episode run just doesn't quite gel. The laughs aren't that big, while the drama is not affecting enough. This over-priced, two-disc set features immaculate AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes and energetic DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes, plus a smattering of extras in the form of three episode commentaries. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

Entourage: Season Six

HBO → All-region BD £18
£30 Approx



While it's a let down that this fantastically funny and smart Hollywood satire has been ditched by ITV2, the good news is that HBO is bringing it to Blu-ray. This three-disc set features all 12 episodes from the typically excellent sixth season, and renders them even glitzier than before, thanks to the striking AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes and smooth DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Extras include a trio of suitably playful episode commentaries and previews, a Season Five recap, and the hilarious in-character ONEXONE public service announcement. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Table fable is a cautionary tale

How do you keep your marriage alive when you eat out at a high-class restaurant?

Date Night is a fairly disposable, mistaken-identity comedy that largely comes to life thanks to its two leads. Steve Carell and Tina Fey play a married couple trying to keep their relationship alive with weekly 'date nights'. But, when they sneak into an exclusive NYC restaurant, using another couple's reservation, they become embroiled with a pair of corrupt cops looking for a flash drive stolen from a mob boss (Ray Liotta). Throw into the mix Mark Wahlberg as the Bond-like action hero they turn to for help, plus the hilarious James Franco and Mila Kunis as the couple they've been mistaken for, and you end up with an entirely silly, but ultimately entertaining screwball comedy.

Mark Craven: Fox has an enviable track record when it comes to Blu-ray encodes, and this is no exception. While it's not necessarily showcase fodder, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode does an excellent job of capturing the film's rich colour palette and natural fleshtones (as demonstrated by a shirtless Mark Wahlberg in Chapter 12). Clarity is also strong, no matter how chaotic things get: just check out the light reflections on the cars and rainswept streets during the chase in Chapters 15 and 16. The only niggle really comes from the abundance of crushed blacks (presumably a stylistic choice), which results in a lack of shadow detail. This is particularly evident in darker scenes, such as the visit to the club in Chapter 19.

Steve May: *Date Night*'s transition from domestic comedy to action yarn might lead you to expect extended histrionics from the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, but in truth, the soundtrack rarely displays an appetite for destruction. This is a very forward facing, dialogue-centric presentation. The sonic (and visual) highlight of the movie is the outrageous central car chase sequence through New York City. System show-offs will love the energetic sound design that's employed when Steve Carell's Audi R8 ends up bumper-locked with a NYC taxi. The resulting duel is a treat, with the growling note of the R8 beautifully realised. Petrol-heads will be distressed to learn that five R8s were totalled during the sequence. Can I also hear the sound of grown men weeping?

Anton van Beek: *Date Night* isn't endowed with an abundance of extra features on Blu-ray, although all of the video material is presented in full HD. You get four deleted and four extended scenes; some alternate takes; a gag reel; camera tests; a short featurette about the cast's real-life bad dates and a couple of featurettes. Of the latter, *Directing 301* is easily the most interesting. The BD ships with a digital copy.



HCC VERDICT

Date Night → 20th Century Fox → Region A/B BD → £25 Approx

We say: Blu-ray adds little to this light-hearted comedy, but it's worth a rent

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Extras: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5





Secondhand woes

A job's not the same when your heart's just not in it...



Repo Men sometimes feels as 'pre-owned' as some of the artificial organs it centres around – especially if you've already seen *Repo: The Genetic Opera*. But, there's still plenty to like about this quirky, sci-fi action thriller. In the near future, a company known as The Union supplies artificial body parts for donors for a price, but miss your payments and they'll send around a repo man to take it back by force. Remy (Jude Law) is one of the best in the repo business, but when he has his own heart replaced and loses the will to kill those who default on repayment, he ends up on the run from his former colleagues.

Mark Craven: Universal has excelled itself with this stunner. Okay, so there are a handful of instances of ringing and minor smearing that prevent it from getting full marks, but overall this AVC 2.40:1 encode delivers everything you'd want. The sharpness of the image ensures that detailing is incredibly realistic, shadow delineation is excellent, colours are accurate to the source and blacks are suitably deep.

Steve May: With its helter-skelter action sequences and sci-fi ballistics, this underrated thriller was always going to hit the right buttons. What I didn't expect was the sheer seismic imagination of the sound design. With a 360° wraparound DTS HD MA 5.1 soundstage, *Repo Men* has as much delineation, panning and thought in its rear channels as it does across the front L/C/R. There is always something meaningful going on, not just thunderclap ambiance and gunplay. Much of this should be credited to Yann Delpuech and Darren King, who have constructed what I would argue is the most visceral and enjoyable soundtrack released this year. Marco Beltrami's score pounds like a fist, and is ingeniously interwoven with the likes of *Toots & the Maytals* and Ian Astbury. Absolutely cracking!

Anton van Beek: As well we delivering both the 111min theatrical cut and 120min 'Unrated Version', *Repo Men* comes to Blu-ray with an enjoyable, if not exactly overwhelming collection of bonus features. Universal has once again delved into its U-Control bag of tricks and delivered a pair of picture-in-picture interactive modes: one is a traditional collection of behind-the-scenes footage and interviews, while the other gives tech specs for the artificial organs.





All smiles: but can they pay for those dentures?

HCC VERDICT

Repo Men → Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx

We say: A derivative but enjoyable offbeat sci-fi thriller

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Charlie's Angels

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Ten years after it hit cinemas, *Charlie's Angels* feels more vapid and useless than ever with its three female leads asked to do nothing more than pout, smile and wear tight clothes, while McG puts them in increasingly stilted action scenes. The Blu-ray itself isn't particularly exciting either, thanks to the film's deliberately over-saturated colour palette and the surprisingly front-heavy DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Extras (ported from the DVD) include a commentary, three deleted scenes, outtakes, six short featurettes and a couple of music videos, and there's also a BD-Live link. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Whip it

Lionsgate → Region B BD
£23 Approx



Drew Barrymore directs this agreeable coming-of-age comedy drama set against the backdrop of an all-girl roller derby. Shauna Cross' witty script make it feel surprisingly fresh and likable. The film certainly looks great on Blu-ray, with the AVC 2.40:1 encode making the most of the teams' brightly coloured outfits and the plentiful skin tones, although you get the feeling that the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix could do with a little more punch during the roller derby scenes. Extras are limited to 16mins of deleted scenes and 35mins of EPK interviews with the cast and crew. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

The Magnificent Seven

20th Century Fox/MGM → Region A/B BD → £20 Approx

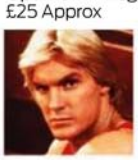


With its stellar cast, this great Hollywood western reworks Akira Kurosawa's 1954 classic *Seven Samurai*. The Blu-ray release makes a worthy upgrade from the DVD in terms of picture quality, with the rich, detailed AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode showing no sign of the over eager noise reduction that afflicted MGM's early hi-def release of *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack makes subtle, yet effective, use of the surrounds, although a DD2.0 version of the original mix is also included to please the purists. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Flash Gordon

Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



If there's one sci-fi film that always leaves a smile on my face it's this take on Alex Raymond's 1930s newspaper strip. Camp, silly and as sexy as producer Dino De Laurentiis' earlier *Barbarella*, *Flash*... benefits from Queen's iconic rock soundtrack (the CD of which is included in this 30th Anniversary Ed), and is an absolute blast from start to finish. This BD appears to use the same source as the old DVD, which means that while the AVC 2.35:1 encode has excellent detailing and clarity, it looks slightly washed-out at times. Sadly, several of the extras from the DVD have been lost in space. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? HCC is here to help

Why are we waiting?

Its 11.50pm on a sweaty Monday night; I can't sleep and need to get something off my mind that is winding me up. For a while now, I have been getting that old feeling I used to have in the good, old DVD days that the UK is being seriously left behind in the Blu-ray stakes.

For instance, *Young Victoria*, a UK film that was originally released on DVD here before it even got a cinema release in the States, has now been released in the US on both DVD and Blu-ray (and is up for pre-release in September on Amazon's German and French sites) without any signs from the UK online retailers. What am I going to tell the wife?

And while we all know that poor MGM is in a bit of a pickle at the moment, *The Man with the Golden Gun* has been out in the US on a Region A release for a while now, and is available on those European Amazon sites, but not ours. What gives? Why are we being treated like this and being left behind?

Luckily for me I have a multiregion machine. Slowly but surely, I am importing all my favourites after caving in waiting for a UK release date that never comes. This way I'm getting my hands on classics (maybe not to everyone's taste, but what the hell!) such as *Carlito's Way*. I even imported *Miss Potter* from Germany, such was my need.

Nick Collins, via email

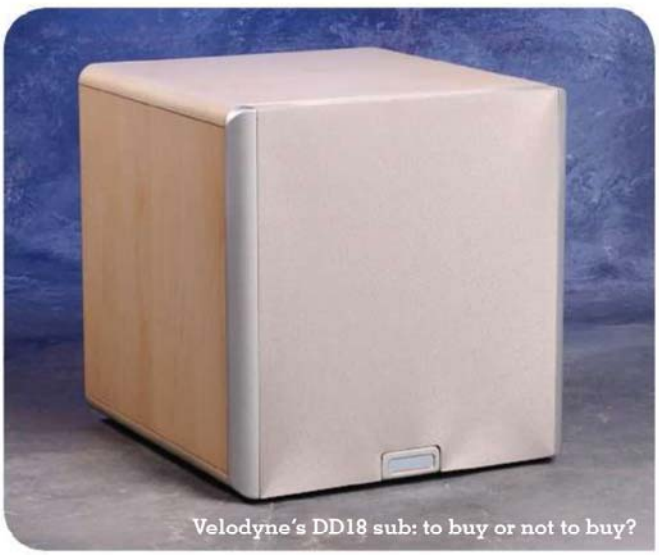
Nick, we share your pain and think you're very wise to have invested in a multiregion deck. If only HD DVD had taken off, eh? Sigh.

As for the Bond release, we suspect you may have to wait for the next 007 outing at the cinemas before Fox/MGM ushers in another slate of back catalogue Blu-rays.

The right choice

Recently I have been on the verge of buying a new sub and I was close to pulling the trigger on a Velodyne DD18 until I heard the new Paradigm Sub1, and the impressive sound quality of this little gem made me stop and reconsider my choices.

However, before buying the Paradigm, I read Richard Stevenson's article in *HCC* #183 discussing how it is best to have two, or even four, subs placed in the corners of the listening room for optimum bass response. This has left me with a conundrum: do I instead purchase a pair of DD12's that have a surface area of approximately 225in², shifted by a total of 2500W RMS, but spaced across 2 corners, or do I stick with the Paradigm that has about 300in²



Velodyne's DD18 sub: to buy or not to buy?

Star Letter

Too much top-end kit?

I would like to question the reason for exorbitantly over priced items being reviewed in *Home Cinema Choice*. Take Issue #184 for instance: The Krell review (5 pages), or SIM2 (3 pages). Obviously, the items exist so someone can afford them, but what percentage of your readership can? Around 0.00001% I'm guessing.

I actually have no problem with a taste of the high-end, but 8 pages wasted on esoteric vanities is a bit much when there is so much out there I would like to see reviewed and that I possibly might buy.

You might have a handful of readers who could purchase these objects of desire; maybe a few custom installers who are interested on behalf of their clients, but no one else beyond the über aspirational.

I have never met one person – acquaintance, colleague, relative, or friend – who has spent more than £2,000 on a single home cinema component (and that's usually on the TV and for much less). Please lose the frippery, put there to give your reviewers a few days of listening pleasure. There is so much gear out there you don't get the chance to review. At least make the stuff you do relevant to us.

Simon, via email

Thanks for your feedback Simon. We raise our hands here and admit that having both the SIM2 projector and Krell system appear in the same issue was probably high-end overkill.

We also understand that these products aren't going to be on everyone's shopping list, but the argument works the other way. For instance,



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of surface area, shifted by just 1700W RMS, pointing out 120° apart in three opposite directions from one spot? Do you have any idea how the geometry of the Paradigm would change the response (in a nice symmetric rectangular room about 28 x 12ft) according to Mr Toole, or perhaps have had any experience or insight as to what would work best?
Tim, via email

Richard Stevenson replies: What a fine dilemma to have, Tim. If you follow the Toole work to the letter, the multiple smaller subs would be best for creating the widest sweet spot in the room. So if it's you, your partner, friends, kids and a dog watching a movie, it's probably best to go with the two DD12s to get the widest 'even' bass response across all listening positions. If, on the other hand, you are gunning for just a solo hot seat, and you are sure there is not a great bass suck-out at your listening position, then the single larger sub tends to sound more cohesive and natural (particularly with 5.1 music).

Speaking from experience of my old listening room, which had about the same proportions as yours, but was a smidge smaller, the multiple subwoofer route really evened out room LF nodes that otherwise made the LF frequency response look like a cross section of the Himalayas.

Adam Rayner agrees: Given the choice of two DD12s or one Sub 1, then I too would be in a world of confusion. I might be tempted by the absurd compactness of the six-woofered Sub 1, but the double DD12 option might just have it in the crisp, uncluttered wavefront department.

in the same issue we ran a group test of budget Blu-ray players, and there are readers who won't have any interest in a £100 BD deck from Sony, whether BBC iPlayer-capable or not, because they doubt it will match the quality of the rest of their setup.

That's the thing with home cinema – it means different things to different people. For some, it's simply a 40in TV and a 5.1 system, for others, it's a full-blown projector-based cinema room with reference level audio and images.

Winner: Star Letter writer Simon wins a copy of *Kick Ass* on Blu-ray, courtesy of Universal Pictures UK. It's available to buy from September 6, priced at £25 approx.

Dots before the eyes

I found the article *Tech Tantrum* in *HCC* #182 a fascinating read, because for the past four or so years I have been enjoying the benefits of a Panasonic projector. I have been very happy with it and had many hours of home cinema fun (3,066 hours to be precise and still on the first bulb). But as pointed out in your article, I'm dreading the day I have to replace the bulb and spend at least £200 on a new one.

Which leads me to my main point; something that has always bugged me with regard to LCD projectors is the issue of dead/faulty pixels and how you often have to live with up to three of them. I was aware of this when I purchased my AE300. I had itfor two months before it developed the fault, and once I knew it was there it really bugged me.

The faulty pixel was a blue one, which meant it stayed on permanent brightness – a source of constant annoyance on dark scenes. I actually had to resort to a technique I read about on the web, which was to place a coloured dot onto the screen to effectively cancel out the colour. In this case it was a yellow dot which saved the day; it didn't totally resolve the problem but I could live with it.

I'm surprised it wasn't something else you highlighted in your article with regard to LCD panels or has the technology improved significantly such that it's no longer a problem? I must admit that if it wasn't an issue I would rush out and buy the Panasonic AE4000 tomorrow. But, because I fear suffering the same set-back, I think I'll stick with what I have – it's done me proud even with the fault.
Chris Nightingale, via email

Glad that you enjoyed Barry Fox's column, and thanks for the handy tip. However, sticking coloured dots on a projection screen is probably not advisable if it's still under warranty. If, for some reason, the screen needs to be replaced, the presence of any adhesive residue might give the manufacturer an opportunity to sneak out of its obligations.

It's also probably worth looking at some kind of less permanent solution. Then, when there's an incidental tweak of the zoom, or the projector moves relative to the screen, it would be easier to move the dot around the screen than realign the image relative to it

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HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 **5**
Essential purchase	1 2 3 **4** 5
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Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Don't touch it	**1** 2 3 4 5

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-40EX503
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

LCD with built-in Freeview HD tuner and Bravia Internet Video

Highs: Free HD channels on tap; value for money; 'net interactivity
Lows: CCFL backlight

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



LG
55in → 55LX9900
£3,700 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

LG's Active Shutter premium 3D screen benefits from its size

Highs: 2D and 3D pics have cinematic scale and punch; good calibration tools
Lows: Crosstalk; weak audio

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 2
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SAMSUNG
40in → UE-40C7000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Debut 3DTV stands out in other areas, too

Highs: Next-gen tech; Freeview HD tuner; app store
Lows: Fiddly control system; 3D effect needs a bigger display

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Via HDMI only
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
47in → 47LE8900
£2,100 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Full LED-backlit LCD with LG's NetCast feature and THX cred

Highs: Smart fascia and interface; good colours and contrast; great calibration tools
Lows: Limited web content

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes , Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SHARP
46in → LC-46LE821E
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Quad Pixel edge-lit LED TV with innovative in-built Flash PVR

Highs: Amazing levels of fine detail; great colour fidelity; useful Time Shift function
Lows: No video streaming

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.sharp.co.uk

Also Recommended...



SONY
40in → KDL-40HX803
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

3D-ready set for those still undecided on the new tech

Highs: 3D upgrade is a sensible option; solid HD performance
Lows: Build-quality could be better; 3D upconversion is poor

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



SAMSUNG
32in → LE40B650
£700 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Look for good deals on this 2009-issue 40in LCD

Highs: Superb features; excellent all-round pics; design
Lows: Audio performance is pretty pathetic

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
42in → 42SL9000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

LG's LED-lit 'Seamless' LCD offers excellent value for money

Highs: Exceptional pictures; ISF-certified calibrated controls
Lows: Black levels aren't A-list; 'Seamless' design isn't all that

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

SAMSUNG
55in → UE55C9000
£7,000 Approx



1 2 3 4 **5**

The 55in Series 9 stands as the crowning glory of Samsung's TV design and technology divisions. It's an extraordinary product which warrants its lofty position in the range, and is a great example of just how accomplished an LCD can be – none of Samsung's rivals have a comparable 'statement' product. As a feature-packed set (3D, 2D-3D conversion, Internet@TV, media streaming) it represents the leading edge in functionality, and the picture quality is exquisite. Once you've seen one in action, you'll want one.

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit: www.samsung.co.uk

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

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Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy
Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and DVB-S2 tuner

Tested: Issue 164
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD
Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

THX-certified, ultrathin PDP with wireless transmission

Highs: Stunning HD and SD pictures; gorgeous design; good features set
Lows: Premium price point

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50G20
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Freeview HD and Freesat HD plasma is the FTA king

Highs: Performance; price; Freesat/Freeview HD tuners;
Lows: USB recording mode comes with strings attached

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity
Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel
Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 154
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
42in → TX-P42G15
£850 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Freesat HD NeoPDP at an enticing price

Highs: Wide viewing angle; excellent HD pics
Lows: Lacks brightness; three HDMIs only

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50VT20
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



The arrival of Panasonic's first 3DTV was always going to get the AV juices running, and this 50in plasma doesn't disappoint – 3D Blu-ray material comes over sharp and smooth with no visible crosstalk, while Sky's half-resolution 3D preview channel is revelatory, with sports coverage in particular showing excellent depth and detail. Other highlights of this surprisingly affordable 3D set include the two pairs of supplied eyewear, class-leading 2D hi-def picture performance, and savvy networking skills.

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications
HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p)
Native resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.4)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



DENON
Blu-ray → DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Reference universal Blu-ray player that sets new standards

Highs: Stunning life-like picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling
Lows: Complex to set up; not for those on a budget!

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: w
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-C6900
£350 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Early adopters will love this 3D Blu-ray player

Highs: 3D compatibility; video quality; USB file support
Lows: v1.4 HDMI output means hookup to older AVRs will be via 7.1 outputs

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S570
£230 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

3D Blu-ray spinner is packed with features

Highs: SACD playback; BBC iPlayer onboard
Lows: No multichannel phono outputs means you'll need a v1.4 AVR for 3D lossless audio

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi, USB, iPlayer, LoveFilm

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD85
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

New top-of-the line deck – until the 3D player arrives...

Highs: Overall picture and sound performance; 'Tube' sound emulator for CDs
Lows: Somewhat sluggish menus; Wi-Fi via dongle only

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi via dongle; SD card slot; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BDT300
£400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

3D BD deck to work in tandem with the brand's 3D plasmas

Highs: Solid AV performance; 3D material is sharp, smooth and involving; twin HDMI outputs
Lows: Wi-Fi is by dongle only

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; optional Wi-Fi dongle; USB; SD slot

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S370 → £150 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



The first of Sony's 2010 Blu-ray players to come through the *HCC* Tech Labs has left us dying to see the higher-end models. This entry-level £150 machine is an absolute AV bargain, blowing its sub £200 rivals out of the water thanks to its superb XMB control interface, BBC iPlayer and LoveFilm online access, Super Audio CD playback and, of course, quality HD video and audio performance. More proof that the Big S's Blu-ray focus is more than just the PS3.

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS HD-MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; 2 x USB; Bravia Internet Video BBC iPlayer, LoveFilm, YouTube, etc

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound
Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live; USB

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs
Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO
Blu-ray → Azur 650BD
£400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

First deck from UK brand is a solid performer – and multiregion DVD, too

Highs: Bulletproof build; excellent AV performance
Lows: No 'net features

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.cambridgeaudio.com

In association with dts Digital Entertainment

Recorders

Best on test...



PHILIPS
Freeview HD PVR → HDT 8520
£250 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Our pick of the new Freeview HD PVRs so far

Highs: Good quality HD and SD pics; cutting-edge looks
Lows: No multimedia functions; EPG can be frustrating

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback
Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications
HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Large HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent
Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sagem.com/uk



DIGITALSTREAM
Freeview HD PVR → DHR8203U
£300 Approx

1 2 **3** 4 5

Versatile Freeview HD PVR from little-known Korean brand

Highs: Build quality; user interface; CI slot; plays JPEGs and MPEGs
Lows: Below-par SD pics

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.dstreamtech.com



GRUNDIG
Freesat PVR → GUFSDTR500HD
£280 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Dual-tuner Freesat+ PVR with capacious 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; cool-running; efficient upscaling of non-HD channels
Lows: USB port is disabled

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.grundig.co.uk

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability
Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications
HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX773
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

DVD/HDD recorder that misses out on Freeview HD

Highs: Solid AV performance; heaps of features and recording flexibility
Lows: No infra-red control over STB; single Freeview tuner only

→ Specifications
HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: No – USB/SD via USB instead
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAGEMCOM
Freeview HD PVR → RT190-320 T2 HD
£250 Approx

1 2 **3** 4 5

First Freeview HD PVR from the Sagem rebrand

Highs: Good quality HD and SD pics; picture window in EPG
Lows: Antediluvian UI; sluggish menu system; ugly LED display

→ Specifications
HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.sagemcomdigital.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850 → £1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility. Freeview HD iterations have joined the stable this Summer.

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications
Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

AV Receivers

Best on test...



NAD
Amp/Processor
M25/M15HD
£6,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Classy heavyweight combo

Highs: Innovative modular design; excellent performance
Lows: No XLR jacks

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 160W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
nadelectronics.com



YAMAHA
AVR → RX-V2065
£850 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

New-look Yamaha receiver is a great sub-£1K all-rounder

Highs: Superb networking prowess; wonderful natural sound that suits all material
Lows: GUI takes some getting used to

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.yamaha.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR5007
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

9.2-channel HD receiver with exhaustive features and power

Highs: First-class home cinema performance; processing allows 9-channel height/width audio
Lows: No proprietary anti-jitter tech, Wi-Fi or secondary remote

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



ONKYO
Amp/Processor
PR-SC5500/PA-MC5500
£3,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Onkyo's separates system delivers on all AV fronts

Highs: Massive power reserves; Smooth AV performance
Lows: Sizable and weighty

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: (Yes FM/AM/net)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3;
Serial port control: Yes;
THX certification: Ultra2;
Component input: 3;
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



SONY
AVR → STR-DH800
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Slick, flexible bargain model with provision for wireless multiroom audio

Highs: Superb value; big and smooth sound; easy to use
Lows: No video upscaling or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 85W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: No
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No, unless you use S-Air wireless speakers
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Editor's Choice...



DENON
AVR → AVR-4810
£2,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Denon's AVR-4810 is the current king of the new breed of receivers that make all sorts of speaker configurations possible. Thanks to Audyssey DSX and Dolby Pro-Logic IIz processing, it's capable of driving an 11.3-channel system (with the aid of an extra stereo amp), and it'll have you re-arranging your speakers in no time. Beyond this mastery of new formats, the AVR-4810 delivers a rich, powerful sound and a full suite of features from Net radio and integrated Wi-Fi to a wide chioce of inputs and four-zone multiroom. Brilliant.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.denon.co.uk

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: AM/FM/Net
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use
Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.nadelectronics.com



ONKYO
AVR → TX-SR608
£450 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

3D-capable AVR delivers great value for money

Highs: Appealing price tag; big, fast, dynamic sound; solid video scaling
Lows: No networking or USB functionality; uninspiring build

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 160W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.4a)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon
Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

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Projectors

Best on test...



INFOCUS
DLP → ScreenPlay SP8602
£3,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

New-look DLP projector from a much-revered brand

Highs: Excellent picture quality; good range of adjustments; different 'skins'
Lows: Not as flexible to set up as some; slightly noisy runner

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 3
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,500 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.infocus.com



VIVITEK
DLP → H1085
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

A brilliant Full HD projector at a mouth-watering price

Highs: Rich colours; excellent image tweaks; 12V trigger
Lows: Noisy runner in high brightness mode; some low-level noise in darker scenes

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com



SONY
SXRD → VPL-VW85
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Successor the VW80 delivers a truly cinematic picture

Highs: Astonishing contrast and detail levels; plenty of picture tweaks
Lows: MotionFlow tech is best left unused

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk/biz



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW5500
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Epson's flagship home cinema projector does LCD proud

Highs: Lots of features; easy and flexible to setup; produces the finest LCD pictures yet
Lows: More expensive than rivals; can lose focus a little

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed) 200,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.epson.co.uk



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Updated flagship PJ adds red-rich lamp and 12V trigger

Highs: Smooth filmic pictures; easy to setup and use; handy feature set
Lows: Boxy design; be careful with high frame-rate settings

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 100,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Also Recommended...



BENQ
DLP → W1000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

A £1K Full HD projector with good colour presets

Highs: Very sharp HD pictures; alluring tactile finish; plenty of fine-tuning options
Lows: Rainbow effect; noticeable fan noise

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 3,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 27dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
benq.co.uk



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness
Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan
Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com

Editor's Choice...

JVC
D-ILA → HD950
£6,000 Approx



1 2 3 4 **5**

Put simply, JVC's video-chucker is capable of an awe-inspiring performance. Spin up a Blu-ray and you'll be rewarded with three-dimensional, natural-looking pictures that are packed with detail, shadow subtlety and vibrant colours. Setting up the HD950 is made easy by its fully-motorised optical adjustments, and a THX-certified colour preset for those not wanting to get their hands dirty in its extensive calibration menus. It's an almost silent runner, too. The best PJ we've yet seen at this price point – and the recent HD990 upgrade improves on it even more!

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.jvc.co.uk

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 900 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Speaker Systems

Best on test...



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → SILVER RX6 AV12s
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Dynamic, engaging sound with pin-sharp detail; taut, powerful bass; excellent build
Lows: Base plinths seem to belong to another design

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 125, 1 x 80W; Rears: Dipolar
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Gloss;
Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



CRYSTAL ACOUSTICS
5.1 → TX-T2-12
£1,300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Great value THX Ultra2-certified array with a classy finish

Highs: Impressive full-range scale and power from relatively small speakers
Lows: Brash and unsubtle; not so good at low volumes

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 150W, 3 x 100W
Rears: Dipoles
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Gloss Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.crystalaudiovideo.com



ACOUSTIC ENERGY
5.1 → AEGIS Neo V2
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Superior £1K system is excellent value for money

Highs: Classy build; dynamic, detailed and exciting audio performance; quality subwoofer
Lows: Sub controls may be daunting for beginners

→ Specifications
Power handling: 5 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.acoustic-energy.co.uk



BOWERS & WILKINS
5.1 → CM Series
£4,250 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Top quality 5.1 array in a classical wood finish

Highs: True sweet highs from hi-tech tweeters; brilliant 10in woofer; solid construction
Lows: Square-edge design not exactly high-end

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 200W, 2 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 8 THX Ultra2
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

5.1 system with THX Ultra2 certification

Highs: Full-fat THX performance at a low-price; huge, potent subwoofer
Lows: Mail-order only means there's no chance to try before you buy

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 120W, 2 x 80W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 600W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.teufel.eu

Also Recommended...



KLIPSCH
5.1 → Icon system
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Sleek-looking US-made system with horn technology

Highs: High-quality audio; excellent value for money; clever, simple-to-use subwoofer
Lows: Not suited to largescale home cinema rooms

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 125W, 2 x 75W, 1 x 100
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.klipsch.co.uk



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ Specifications
Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



Q ACOUSTICS
5.1 → 2000 Series
£550 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Excellent 5.1 sub/sat system with living-room friendly looks

Highs: Detailed, compact satellites; alternative finishes/ supports; tweakable sub
Lows: Slightly rough sound when extended; lack of high-frequency subtlety

→ Specifications
Power handling: 4 x 75W, 1 x 100W; Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 140W
Finish: Gloss;
Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.qacoustics.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.kef.com/gb

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

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Subwoofers

Best on test...



NAIM
SW → n-Sub
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Class AB amp-driven premium-level subwoofer

Highs: Rich, textured bass with tight control; innovative features
Lows: High-end rivals have a *bit* more grunt to 'em

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 2-Hz-250Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 350W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29.6kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.naim-audio.com



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent i
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance
Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.martinlogan.com



PARADIGM
SW → Signature Sub 2
£7,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Reference grade sub for serious installs only

Highs: Astonishing power, control and speed; build quality is first-rate
Lows: Can you afford one?

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 7Hz-150Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 4,500W
Driver: 6 x 10in
Weight: 105.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.paradigm.com



TANNOY
SW → TS1201
£600 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

12in sub with simultaneous LFE and speaker level inputs

Highs: Smart looks; easy of use; real weight and presence
Lows: Remote control will cost you extra

→ Specifications
Frequency response: Down to 21Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 16.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.tannoy.com



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration
Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.velodyne.com

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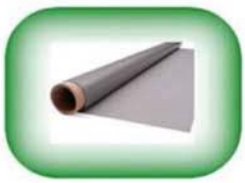
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